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THE MODERN SHORT-STORY

A STUDY OF THE FORM:
ITS PLOT, STRUCTURE, DEVELOPMENT
AND OTHER REQUIREMENTS

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NEW YORK
THE A. S. BARNES COMPANY
1914

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Set up and electrotyped. Published January, 1914

THE·PLIMPTON·PRESS
NORWOOD·MASS·U·S·A

$1.00
JAN 26 1914
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TO

RUDYARD KIPLING

MASTER OF THE MODERN SHORT-STORY
MASTER OF THE MAGIC OF WORDS
THIS BOOK IS RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED
BY THE AUTHORS

PREFACE

THE object of this book is to state as clearly as may be, just what the modern Short-story is, and to enumerate and expound the principles underlying the most typical examples of this distinctive kind of fiction. An experience of several years as a teacher of college classes in Short-story writing convinced me that in the case of my own students I could secure better results by the use of a text-book different in type from any of those available. Some of the existing works on the subject treat in elaborate detail the development of the Short-story from the time of the narratives of the Egyptian papyri; others confuse the student by discussing at too great length many related forms of merely short fiction. In regard to other more or less admirable texts, I have only to say that my method differs from that laid down in any of them. In teaching the writing of the Short-story, I have thought it best to hold to the strictly modern form, and to leave the history of its evolution as matter for a separate and distinct course of study. I soon became convinced that I should have to make

a restatement of what is known about the Short-story in the order which experience taught me was most serviceable from the teacher's point of view.

When this conviction came to me, I found myself too closely occupied with other imperative duties to undertake such a work. It was my good fortune to be able to turn, at this time, to one of my former students, Miss Lucy Lilian Notestein, a graduate of the University of Wooster. She brought to the work a broad and thorough knowledge of the subject, an enthusiastic devotion, and a carefulness of detail which I myself could scarcely have summoned. Thus it is that, although the idea of this book originated with me, the actual work has all been done by Miss Notestein. Together we have agreed upon the plan and the contents of the volume, and together we have read it in proof.

It will be noticed that, in the main, the text is based upon a few modern Short-stories which have earned for themselves an established place in literature. We have felt that it is a distinct gain to illustrate all points by reference to these few examples. Teachers may require students to become thoroughly familiar with the stories herein referred to, and students will find a distinct gain in power in actually mastering these specimens. Moreover, the principles underlying these Short-stories will be found to be the principles underlying all good Short-stories. Although in the preparation of this book

many hundreds of stories have been read, we have refrained from burdening the text with titles. The restriction of examples is a part of our method.

Those who desire histories of the Short-story may select from a number on the market. Bibliographies of the subject are now easily accessible. We have therefore burdened this volume with neither history nor bibliography. We have made an effort to hold to the original purpose: to set forth a study of the Short-story in its typical modern form. We have consulted at first hand all the published literature bearing upon this fictional form, and have used it as best suited our purpose. We have tried to indicate in all cases direct indebtedness to previous writers on the same subject.

It is our hope that this book may prove of much value to the rapidly increasing number of private readers and students who are finding in the Short-story that high degree of satisfaction which comes from a study of finished art. Although prepared primarily for use as a college text-book, the volume is not, in our opinion, for that reason less adapted to the use of the general reader, but more so. Every attempt has been made to avoid vagueness and obscurity of statement: no attempt has been made to employ technical or unusual terms for the sake of the terms themselves. We have tried to be honestly, transparently straightforward and unostentatious.

There remains only the pleasure of acknowledging the unusual debt of gratitude we owe to Jonas O. Notestein, Aylsworth Professor of the Latin Language and Literature; to Mr. Walter E. Peck, of the department of Rhetoric and English Composition, in the University of Wooster; and to Mrs. Fern Greenwald Dunn. For helpful suggestion, sympathetic criticism, and aid in seeing this volume through the press, we can render to them no adequate return.

WALDO H. DUNN

University of Wooster,
October 4, 1913

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THE MODERN SHORT-STORY

THE MODERN SHORT-STORY

I

THE MODERN SHORT-STORY

THE Short-story[1] years ago felt its way into modern art. To-day it is an insistent presence. It has passed safe through the period of experimentation, and is the most popular, as well as the most modern, of literary forms. It is more than mere short narrative. It is an artistic fact, distinct, definite, governed by specific laws. Yet it is akin to the other forms of narrative art. The Short-story witch gathered material from varied sources: some qualities she took from the novel, some from the tale and the sketch, some from the drama. Allied to all of these forms, yet different from each, the Short-story combines in a new way narrative interest, brevity, unity of emotional impression, and climactic plot.

"The Short-story is a small thing, cunningly

[1] We accept Brander Matthews' method of designating the form: "I have written 'Short-stories' with a capital S and a hyphen because I wished to emphasize the distinction between the Short-story and the story which is merely short. The Short-story is a high and difficult department of fiction. The story which is short can be written by anybody who can write at all; and it may be good, bad, or indifferent; but at its best it is wholly unlike the Short-story." Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short-story*, pp. 24–5. Longmans, Green & Co., New York, 1901.

wrought. From the first line to the last it must be decorated, polished, highly concentrated, closely welded."[1] Because of these strict requirements, it has developed a regularity of structure almost unknown to other literary forms. Nowhere else must the literary artist be so conscious of his art. It has been said that ". . . there is no form of literary art, not even the sonnet, to which the mechanics of composition are more essentially important than to the successfully excellent Short-story. Here form is not paramount, but, without qualification or peradventure, it is here absolutely essential to the effect sought."[2] This studied regularity of structure is, however, not a hindrance to beauty or to power: it but lends the charm of perfection. One looks with admiration at an empty honeycomb. Yet it is the mechanical perfection of its construction that causes one's pleasure in seeing it. One wonders at the skill which has built the cells so faultlessly. Little pleasure would be experienced in examining a honeycomb of irregular cells arranged in no definite order. Thus the Short-story form[3] has not lost but gained by reason of its restrictions.

[1] *Harper's Weekly*, May 23, 1908, p. 8.

[2] Rankin, *Poet Lore*, 17: 1; 105.

[3] "The Short-story in prose literature corresponds, then, to the lyric in poetry; like the lyric, its unity of effect turns largely upon its brevity; and as there are well-known laws of lyric structure which the lyric poet violates at his peril or obeys to his triumph, so the Short-story must observe certain conditions and may enjoy certain freedoms that are peculiar to itself." Bliss Perry, *A Study of Prose Fiction*, p. 306.

The restrictions of the Short-story form necessarily affect the range of its possible subject-matter. No whole life can be treated adequately, no complex plot can be entertained, within the brief limits set for the Short-story. Unlike the novel, it shows not the whole man — except by passing hint — but a significant moment or experience, a significant character-trait. However vividly this chosen moment may be interpreted, much will still be left to the imagination. It is the aim of the Short-story writer to trace the causal relations of but one circumstance, so that this circumstance may be intensified. He isolates so that he may throw the flash-light more searchingly on some one event, on some one element of character, on some one emotion. He presents "in a vigorous, compressed, suggestive way, a simplification and idealization of a particular part or phase of life." [1]

". . . If all narration amounts, as critics say, merely to a simplification of experience, imaginative or real, then a Short-story is simplification to the highest degree. We are selecting far more than in a novel, and this because we are looking only for the chain of related incidents that go to make up one event. We are picking out the steps that make the tragedy, as in Maupassant's famous story, *The Necklace*, or in Kipling's *Without Benefit of Clergy;* we are looking only for what bears upon our narrow purpose, that the interest may be concentrated, and the conception vivified, beyond the power of

[1] Albright, *The Short-story*, p. 5.

the novel. The process is very artificial, but very powerful; it is like turning a telescope upon one nebula in the heavens." [1] "It [the Short-story] affords, too, ample opportunity for subtle and penetrating analysis; for close and merciless study of morbid temperaments or vitally sympathetic portraitures of great natures contending with tragic conditions; for the segregation of a bit of significant experience and a finished presentation of its aspects and effects; for the detachment of a single figure from the dramatic movement, and a striking sketch of its features and gestures; for the dissection of a motive so searching and skilful that its deepest roots are laid bare; for effectiveness in bringing a series of actions into clear light in a sudden and brief crisis, and telling a complete story by suggestion; for the delicate impressionism which, by vividness or charm of phrase and diffusion of atmosphere, magically conveys the sense of landscape; for the wealth of humor concentrated on a person or an incident, and for the touch of tragedy resting like the finger of fate on an experience or a character." [2] The work of the Short-story is to make life vivid by signalizing moments.

It has been a popular misconception that a Short-story writer should use as material only crucial incidents or situations. Since only one event or situation can be emphasized in a Short-story, it is natural to suppose that a writer ought to choose

[1] Jessup and Canby, *The Book of the Short-story*, p. 24.
[2] Mabie, *Outlook*, 89: 119.

the one determining crisis which makes or mars, the supreme struggle of a soul, the one great change or turning-point in a life-history. Such moments do afford wonderful opportunities for striking analyses, for emotional stress, for the suggestion of a whole character sketched in the act of meeting its test; they have been the bases of many of the best Short-stories — stories of real literary value. One expects from the more significant subject the more telling interpretation. It is true that an inspiring subject goes a long way toward the making of a successful story. Yet a great subject may easily fail of becoming a great story. Literature does not content itself simply with rendering the significant more significant; it may find its glory quite as really in the commonplace.

Although every life has its crucial turning-points, every life has, also, its minor crises, its incidents which are less than crises, — almost anecdotes. These, too, the Short-story writer may interpret. He may picture the little sorrows, the little joys, the little victories, the little defeats. He may show the inconsistencies and incongruities of life. "It is his delight to observe and note the fresh, the striking, the unusual or interesting phases of human life about him, to turn them over in his mind till they have taken definite new form, and send them forth again — his own creation." [1] A whole life may not be vitally affected by what happens in some unimportant moment, but in the light of this

[1] Albright, *The Short-story*, p. 14.

moment a whole character may be explained. Upon brief and inconsequential moments [1] the greater number of our modern magazine Short-stories are based. Vivid and satisfying as her narratives are, Mary Wilkins Freeman used the commonplace incidents and situations of a work-a-day world for her New England stories. O. Henry, with a purpose of showing the ordinary life of the average man or woman in New York, has often used incidents which to most of us would never have seemed worth the telling. Maupassant has written an interesting story based on the picking up of a piece of string. One thing is demanded, however, of the writer of such a story: he must develop through this incident some one aspect of human nature in its intensity by bringing out its high lights. By touching upon human nature, the story-writer establishes a link between the individual, — no matter how queer, unusual, or commonplace he may be, — and mankind. We know him; for, broadly speaking, we are actuated by the same motives and passions. The story has a meaning. At least, we have gained a glimpse into the spirit of mankind. Thus, even the commonplace is rendered significant.

Thus far, it has been intimated that Short-story

[1] "Art, likewise, perceives that its function to-day is not alone the great setting forth of the awakening of the human soul or of the human soul's great achievements and grand failures, but also the adequate presentation of that soul's stuff and of its relations, item by item, and each item in isolation." Rankin, *Poet Lore*, 17: 1; 105.

material is either incident or situation. Incident needs no explanation. It is a simple occurrence or event, a passing experience. It is a bank failure, the arrest of a thief, the bursting of a flood-dyke, a football victory, the overturning of a canoe, a class rush. One incident must be treated in itself, and apart from its consequences. A situation, however, presents concretely a significant relation between persons and persons, or persons and things or circumstances.[1] It is a condition which may or may not be followed by certain definite results. Although an incident may be detached from a course of events, it is complete in itself; although a situation may be related more or less closely to the current of events, it is itself incomplete.[2]

Suppose a man arrested on a false charge of theft; a telegraph operator marooned with no communication with the outside world save by his disordered instrument; a hard-working Italian deprived by a bank failure of the money he had been treasuring up for importing his wife and family. These are situations. In *They*, Kipling has supposed a blind woman possessed with an overwhelming love of children, endowed with a sixth sense, — a capa-

[1] "A situation may be defined as any active relationship between character and circumstances." H. S. Canby, *A Study of the Short-story*, p. 43.

[2] "Incidents are groups of continuous details forming a complete interest in themselves as ministering to our sense of story. . . . In *Situation*, on the other hand, a series of details cohere into a single impression without losing the sense of incompleteness." R. G. Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, pp. 286–7.

bility of association with a disembodied spirit. Assume a man happily recovered from a long prison experience who realized to the full the degrading influence of prison-life. Coppée has used this situation in *The Substitute.* Suppose a baby should be born in the rough, immoral atmosphere of a California mining camp, and you have the basis for Bret Harte's well-known story, *The Luck of Roaring Camp.* Suppose a person should take on the features of that which he constantly beholds. Hawthorne developed this situation in *The Great Stone Face.* The greater number of great stories seem to be built upon situations rather than upon incidents. The greater number of our present-day magazine stories are built upon situations. To treat a situation adequately, to clothe it in fitting incident, may take perhaps a more consummate art than to visualize a striking event, but the resulting story is generally much the more satisfying. To be made significant and active, the situation must gather about itself illustrative incident and character; it must result strikingly; it must lead progressively to an end.

Whether, indeed, the Short-story material be incident or situation, the interest must progress toward a highest point, a logical and emotional goal. "In other words, there must be a climax, an event remarkable in some respect; *and* something must happen to the character as a result of something which he has done; *and,* as Howells wishes, the character must express himself in the

episodes." [1] The climax is the focus, the converging point of all possible lines of vision for the story. It is the apex. Everything must lead either to it or away from it. One should be able to look back and see just how every step has been tending toward it. Matthews says, "The Short-story in which nothing happens at all is an absolute impossibility." [2] This happening, this action at its culmination is the climax, the decisive moment of change. Climax, however, implies "a steady heightening of interest to a full close, rather than the mental or emotional jerk occasioned by surprise." [3] It is the natural turning-point of a story, the place where for the first, one fully realizes the force of incident or situation.

To achieve this climax, one must use a conscious method, a design, a plot.[4] Plot is "a fusion of details into unity," by means of the "imaginative reason"; [5] a weaving together of details for an intended pattern. In the Short-story, however, — indeed in all dramatic fiction — plot is no simple fusion or weaving of details; it is a fusion or weaving for an end. That end is climax. Plot necessitates selection from the great mass of possible

[1] Pitkin, *Short-story Writing*, pp. 27–8.

[2] Brander Matthews, *The Philosophy of the Short-story*, p. 35.

[3] Albright, *The Short-story*, p. 51.

[4] Although plot might be interpreted as the full design in detail, it is more generally applied to the brief statement of the essentials of the plan. In the Short-story, the plot ought to be such that it might be expressed in one compact sentence.

[5] Whitcomb, *The Study of a Novel*, pp. 48–9.

details of only such as will harmonize and complete the design. It makes possible the steady gradation of interest toward the end. It involves, in the Short-story, emphasis upon climax so sustained as to require the omission of everything which does not tend directly towards climax, and of nothing which would heighten the effect. Character and incident, character and character, incident and incident, must be so wrought together that they are mutually dependent. "A plot," according to Mr. Pitkin, "is a climactic series of events, each of which both determines and is determined by the characters involved." He says further: "If the determination is one-sided, there results no plot, in the strict dramatic sense. Thus, suppose the events shaped the destiny of the character but were not themselves directed by him; the hero would then be little more than the passive victim of circumstances, and the story would take on the loose vesture of flowing adventure, like the yarns of Sinbad, the Sailor." [1] The tale is the sum of parts unrelated, while the Short-story is a vital whole. Loosen one thread from the web of the Short-story, the whole is weakened, and the climax unprovided for. The very simplicity of the plot for a story of a single situation allows and requires great firmness and strength of texture.

Not only does the Short-story require plot and climax — the dramatic essentials — but it must produce upon the mind of the reader a single impres-

[1] Pitkin, *Short-story Writing*, p. 24.

sion or effect. This effect is that which will unconsciously remain fixed as a brooding influence on the reader's mind even after the essentials of plot have faded from memory. Sometimes, at the end of a story, one is able to formulate the impression; more often, unless one subjects it to analysis, it remains unnamed but none the less powerful. A single impression should be, however, so vivid that it is capable of analysis. Impressions are generally of two kinds — either a feeling, an emotion; or simply a sense of the new realization of some truth. Poe was a master of effects. In his stories are well exemplified the simple impressions of feeling, — of impending doom, as in *The Pit and the Pendulum;* of pure horror, as in *The Black Cat.* Some impressions may be stated more definitely. The single impression of *Mrs. Knollys* is the beauty of a triumphant hope. In Daudet's *The Last Class,* it is sympathy for the lovers of the old Alsace-Lorraine. In *They,* it is "the consciousness of the presence of the spirits of little children." [1] The impression of *The Drums of the Fore and Aft* is simply self-sacrificing heroism; of *Rappaccini's Daughter* it is of beauty at once prodigal and dangerous. A situation may suggest several different effects. Of these, only one may be chosen for emphasis in the Short-story, and this one chosen effect will go a long way toward determining the progress of the story. "In so far as technique is concerned, the single effect is more

[1] Waite and Taylor, *Modern Masterpieces of Short Prose Fiction,* p. xx.

fundamental than the dramatic effect. It determines much more profoundly the structure of the Short-story. Furthermore, it is, one might say, an absolute ideal, whereas the dramatic is relative to the particular material of each plot. For instance, a weak dramatic quality will not ruin a story, provided some one emotion or some one idea is vividly played upon; but, conversely, there is no hope for a story, however dramatic, if it leaves you with either no definite impression at all, or else with several in conflict and unrelated." [1]

It is the single impression which more than any other one thing sets off the Short-story as a separate literary form. A novel may have many impressions; it may thrill with a wide range of emotions throughout its progress. Each varying incident, each minor crisis, produces its peculiar impression. Each episode of a novel is long enough for the development of one impression. When, then, these episodes are gathered into one whole, many emotional effects may be represented. It is true that some novels do seem to produce a single impression. In *The Scarlet Letter*, one feels always that there is no escape from the effects of a sin once committed. The whole story is developed to insure this impression. Each crisis, each new movement, emphasizes it. Yet each movement is in itself a new situation with its own passing impression. The final impression, too, seems the result of the development of a situation in retrospect. This treatment of a situation allows new

[1] Pitkin, *Short-story Writing*, pp. 22–3.

situations always to arise out of the old. There is in this novel, therefore, a method of attaining the single impression quite different from that used in the Short-story, which is always the progress of a situation toward realization. Just as the incidents of a Short-story all lead to one climax of action, they must all lead, also, to one dominant impression. Scattered impressions in the Short-story mean no impression, for, within the limits of the modern Short-story, one and only one impression can be developed with intensity.

"The first essential for unity of impression is singleness of purpose, resulting in simplicity of plot. The end must not only be foreseen from the beginning; it must dominate the whole progress of the story." [1] Not only the unity but the intensity of the impression is dependent upon climax, is enforced by climax. Tone and climax should be in such harmony that either one might suggest the other. If the climax is a moment of distress, the single impression should be sustained as a preparation; if the single impression is horror, then the climax should be a moment of very intense horror. There have been written stories of a single impression and of action without a climax. Such stories are mere narrative sketches, because they lack "the conflict of forces which results in definite action and outcome." [2] They may produce, to be sure, a single impression, but one which

[1] Albright, *The Short-story*, p. 85.

[2] Waite and Taylor, *Modern Masterpieces of Short Prose Fiction*, p. x.

lacks the utmost definiteness, distinctness. One is conscious of it, but one cannot see it, or feel it. It is as water-vapor, which must come in contact with cold before it is precipitated in visible, tangible form as rain. Climax is the point of precipitation of a single impression. Again, suppose a person should see, stretching before him to the horizon, a succession of low undulating hills, each hill covered with charred stumps and scorched tree-snags. The impression might be simply that of gloom. Suppose, then, that this person should sight on a hill the still smoking ruins of a dwelling. The scene has at once an objective point. Thus in a Short-story, the single impression is at once centralized and vivified by climax.

The kinds of impression from which the Short-story writer may choose are myriad. As the variations of life, so are the possible impressions to be gained from man's changing relationships in life. Impressions are intellectual or emotional. If the impression is only of ingenuity — such as dexterity in solving a problem — it is classed as intellectual. If, however, the impression is centered upon the effect of the solution on a main character, it becomes emotional. Ingenuity has then resulted in a pleasurable satisfaction of curiosity, in surprise, or admiration. Even these, however, are but intellectual emotions. They do not come from the heart, they would not in themselves serve as motives for action. The Short-story demands that its impression be truly emotional. If the story depended solely on satisfying curiosity,

then the more the curiosity could be stimulated by building puzzle upon puzzle, the greater the ingenuity needed to find a solution. Although the impression would still remain single, there would be no limit to the number of incidents allowed in a story. Incident might be piled upon incident endlessly: with every addition the story would become the more effective. The detective story may thus fail of being a true Short-story. Such a story as Poe's *The Purloined Letter* is, as Mr. Canby suggests, a tale in Short-story form. Such a story, however, might become a true Short-story, if an emotional impression could be added and could be made to coincide with it in a climax. For a true Short-story, a single emotional impression is absolutely essential.

The length of a Short-story depends upon the situation or incident with which one has to deal. This situation may take five pages to develop to a fitting climax; it may take sixty. If one remembers, however, that a single impression must be produced, through a single situation wrought to a climax, the length of the story will not go far wrong. Poe says: "The ordinary novel is objectionable from its length. . . . As it cannot be read at one sitting, it deprives itself, of course, of the immense force derivable from *totality*. Worldly interests intervening during the pauses of perusal modify, annul, or counteract in a greater or less degree, the impressions of the book. But simple cessation in reading would, of itself, be sufficient to destroy the true unity. In the brief tale, however, the author is enabled to carry out the

fullness of his intention, be it what it may. During the hour of perusal the soul of the reader is at the writer's control. There are no external or extrinsic influences resulting from weariness or interruptions."[1] The more swiftly, then, the story moves, the more powerful will be the impression.

Much the same principle is employed in determining the time in which the action should be made to take place, the place of the action, and the number of characters introduced. So long as unity of impression and sustained emphasis on a climactic situation are not violated, it makes little difference whether the action requires five minutes or fifty years; whether the place be varied from the north pole to the torrid zone; whether the characters number one or one hundred. Usually, however, the Short-story will require that only one main character be introduced. Secondary characters are generally introduced as foils to the main character. It is conceivable that even in a Short-story a mob might have the principal part. Of course, in such a case, one would treat the mob, not as a collection of individuals, but as a whole. Short-story principles would yet apply. We are ready, then, for a definition: *The Short-story is a narrative producing a single emotional impression by means of sustained emphasis on a single climactic incident or situation.*

Poe was the originator of the modern Short-story in America. He first formulated a philosophy for the Short-story; he first applied the principles

[1] Poe, *On Hawthorne's Twice-Told Tales.*

successfully in his own art. It will, perhaps, be useful, then, to compare the definition just given with the principles laid down by him. He says: "A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived *effect*. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition, there should be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design." [1] Poe has here emphasized unity of impression as fundamental: all the incidents must establish this "*preconceived effect*." Next, the first sentence must tend directly to this effect: briefly, no time must be lost in the beginning of the real story. Lastly, the whole must be governed by the principle of selection: no slightest detail whose tendency is not toward this pre-established design can be admitted. The gist of the paragraph is, briefly: The essential mark of the Short-story is unity of impression gained by a dominating and selective emphasis on a preconceived design. The definition already stated accords, then, with this summary of Poe's; for a dominating is a sustained emphasis, and selective is understood in the expression "*a climactic situation*." In this

[1] Poe, *On Hawthorne*.

expression, however, there is included more than selective emphasis for unity of effect; there is a climax. Poe worked in the belief that the strongest impression was reached only through the strongest incident expressive of that impression. In weaker hands than Poe's, however, the Short-story governed by such a principle would have dwindled to mere impressionism. A safeguard has been added, therefore, and this safeguard is climactic plot.

Although, in the statement of the definition, the technically perfect Short-story has been assumed, it should be clearly understood that there are many Short-stories, — good Short-stories — which fail of technical perfection. They may admit of more or less digression, they may reach several crises which in their force are almost climaxes. No one doubts that Hale's *The Man Without a Country* is really effective, yet one could scarcely call it a technically perfect Short-story. It is based, it is true, on a single climactic situation: a man has expressed a desire never again to hear the name of his native land. The final climax comes at the death of the man. Yet there are other climaxes: where Lieutenant Nolan reads from *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* the lines

> "Breathes there the man, with soul so dead
> Who never to himself hath said, —
> 'This is my own, my native land!'"

where he dances with Mrs. Graff; where his bravery is rewarded by the Captain; and where he acts as interpreter for the poor slaves who wish to be taken

back home. After each one of these climaxes, the interest wanes and is gradually increased for the next climax. In short, emphasis has not been sustained. Hawthorne was constantly violating the ideal Short-story structure by an unnecessary insistence on the moral of his story. He loved the symbolic too well to keep from over-emphasizing it. Yet Hawthorne's stories are so delicately wrought that they live in spite of the digressions. What has been done — even by the masters — is, however, not always a safe rule of practice. The master in every art is allowed some privileges denied to amateurs. Beginners should first of all work in accordance with the laws of their art. They should aim at nothing short of technical perfection. Otherwise, they will unwittingly fall into blunders which will make the story ineffective; otherwise, they can never hope to attain to proficiency. Beginners will find difficulty enough in trying to write an effective Short-story when they are following certain rules; they would find much greater difficulty if there were no rules to follow. The Short-story, in any case, must be effective.

Of the Short-story, there are three main types, — the story of action, the story of character, the story of setting. These kinds may be combined, so long as one element, action, character, or setting, remains predominant. Thus a character story may have, also, action and setting as auxiliary. One might have *character* — action — setting; *action* — character — setting; *setting* — action — character. To

vary one of these elements will change a whole story. Since there are innumerable situations in this life of ours, and as many different motives for action as there are actions; since no two characters are identical; and since in setting, one has the whole world to choose from, there is little likelihood of a dearth in Short-story material. A story, too, may be changed simply by the attitude or the purpose of its writer, by humor, by contrast, by local color.

Although no complete classification is here attempted, it may be useful briefly to survey several of the most common kinds of the modern Short-story. These are the mystery and psychological story; the problem story; the story of social and economic conditions; of a special class or locality; of a special mood; the story of adventure; and the story of symbolism. It is clear that one story may sometimes be classed under several different heads. For example, *Markheim* is a psychological story; it might also be classed as a problem story. A story of a certain locality might also be a story treating of social and economic conditions.

Under the mystery story may be placed ghost stories, stories of the psychologically occult, detective stories, and simple instances of the unexplained. Stories of this character are O'Brien's *What Was It? A Mystery*, *The Horla* by Maupassant, *William Wilson* by Poe, Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.* The mystery story is popular among beginners, since it is thought that the narration of the unusual or marvelous cannot fail of attracting attention. To

make a mystery story convincing, is, however, a difficult task. Unless the reader's imagination is so firmly gripped that for the moment the story seems true, no real interest is awakened. To treat the unreal so that it appears real is a work for a skilled artist.

There is also the problem story. The problem may be solved or unsolved. Stockton's *The Lady or the Tiger?* is a perfect example. Here the question is so artfully put that it can never be answered. Ordinarily, however, the problem is solved, as in *Markheim* and in Hamlin Garland's *The Branch Road.* This kind of story, too, is difficult. It requires that the writer have an exceedingly firm grasp of the situation. Before the proper time, the reader's sympathies must not be swayed too much in one direction or too much in the other. There must be suspense. Yet the solution, if there be a solution, must be prepared for; it must seem natural. Often the problem story requires that the writer do double duty: that he show convincingly vacillation of mind in the main character, and that he stimulate temporarily a similar vacillation in the mind of the reader. Beginners should remember, too, that a story which leads one straight toward an end, and then stops with a jerk, is not a problem story.

Closely allied to the problem story is that which does not directly indicate a social or economic problem, but as surely implies its existence in the basis of a story. Such are the stories based upon strikes, upon class hatred and distinctions, upon the treat-

ment of the criminal, upon the miserable life of those in the crowded districts of the cities, upon the immigrant question, upon business fraudulence, upon political dishonesty, upon all those social and economic conditions which are of vital importance to the world at present. Of this kind of story the magazines are full. It is popular, and justly so. "The writer must be in touch with the thought and feeling of the public at any given time. . . . If what he writes is worth anything, it must help the public to think out the problems which are actually before it. . . . What people like best is to know of something that falls in naturally with their own lives, and consciously or unconsciously, helps them in a practical way to live. Unless it really touches their interests it counts for little." [1]

Then there is the story of a special class — the story of a certain locality, of a certain section, even of a business or industry. In these, the aim is faithfully to depict the individual characteristics belonging to such a class or to such a locality. This land is so broad that it has allowed people to develop under many different environments, each of which has its own distinct type. Thus we have had Short-story writers for New England, for the extreme south, for the middle south, for New York, for California and the gold-seekers, for the middle west, for the southwest, for the north.[2] Scarcely a region

[1] Sherwin Cody, *Story Writing and Journalism*, p. 106.

[2] For an interesting discussion of this kind of story see *The American Short-story*, by Elias Lieberman.

but has had its spokesman. Then there are the stories of mining regions and of the lumber camps. Under this type, too, are stories devoted to a profession, — medicine, law, teaching, the ministry, and business.

Not only is there the story of some special class or locality, but the story of a special mood or emotion. Here are classed the horror story, the story of pathos, the purely humorous story, the love story. These stories depend much on the definiteness of the single impression. Beginners are liable to one of two mistakes: either they will over-emphasize the emotion till it becomes ridiculous or melodramatic and unnatural, or they will dilute it till it is as flatly tasteless as a dish of unsalted mush. Stories of emotion must be handled with restraint.

No one should leave out of this list the delight of the small boy — the adventure story in which "the interest of the reader centers in what the characters do instead of in what they are." [1] Here may be classed stories of railroad wrecks, of aeroplane flights, of strange escapes from fire and flood, of robberies, of tramp life, or of bear-hunts. One might class here, also, the stories depending on invention, — on wireless telegraphy, for example, — or on some unknown invention wholly in the mind of the writer, whereby he is enabled to accomplish some wonderful feat. These stories are ordinarily what have been called incident stories as contrasted with situation stories. In the adventure story, one must be careful

[1] J. Berg Esenwein, *Studying the Short-story*, p. 4.

that the Short-story does not degenerate into a tale through the relation of a succession of thrilling incidents.

The story of symbolism was in use long before the modern Short-story came to be recognized. Its age, however, has made it no less amenable to Short-story form. Here belong the parable and the allegory, both of which are especially designed to teach "utilitarian or spiritual truths." Each form has its advantages. The actors of the allegory are more individual than those of the parable. "But although more individual, the allegory is less human than the parable; for the happenings of the parable are always probable, while those of the allegory may be probable, improbable, or so fantastic as to be wholly impossible.[1] " The difficulty in all stories of symbolism is that of keeping the moral in due subjection. It is as hard to keep the point of a story covered by symbol as it is to keep a lively kitten hidden in a basket. The moral may be suggested; it should not be directly stated. The point may be all right, but bald didacticism has gone out of style. People generally prefer their sermons straight. In a story, they do not wish the lesson to be too obvious. They wish to feel that whatever lesson there is lurking underneath a story has been found by their own superior interpretative powers.

Not every story need be didactic, yet every story should aim to have a worthy purpose, be it to enter-

[1] Harriott Ely Fansler, *Types of Prose Narratives*, p. 117.

tain or to instruct. "The author is bound to interpret, else literature were as soulless as a photograph. He cannot escape interpretation; for it is only because experience *means* something to him that he cares to extend and make it permanent by giving it literary expression." [1]

Perhaps more widely read at the present time than any other form of literature, it must be that the Short-story has a mission. In an inspiring article on *The Future of the Short-story*, Mr. E. C. Black says that he considers the Short-story "a more powerful antidote to the most dangerous tendencies in the life of the present day than any of the elaborate schemes of social reform can possibly be." He claims for the Short-story writers that "they are vindicating the ideal element in fiction, for they are painting life as it is, and painting it from a point of ethical and ideal insight. . . . They are showing that human nature is, after all, a noble thing; that lowly folk, bowed with labor and environed by stern enough conditions of time and place, may be, like the king's daughter, all glorious within. . . . They are bringing man nearer man. . . . They are awakening men and women to the goodness as well as to the strangeness and fascination of their kind. . . . They are revealing the identity of human nature." [2]

Whether or not Short-story writers deserve this

[1] Albright, *The Short-story*, p. 178.

[2] E. C. Black, *The Future of the Short-story, International Monthly*, 1: 214.

praise, it is certain that they may be of inestimable value to mankind. They may cheer through emphasis often upon the joyous and amusing in life; they may instruct by giving people broadened visions of the world; they may inspire to worthy motive and noble action by a stimulation of the best emotions, by education to thought upon "whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report."

II

THE GERMINAL IDEA

More or less indefiniteness frequently attaches to the term *germinal idea.* It is made synonymous with motive, theme, purpose; with the subject of a story; and since subject is loosely used, it may even be confused with title. It is regarded as almost an abbreviated plot; in short, as the kernel of the story. It is true that the germinal idea may take any of these forms; that it may suggest them or develop into them. Yet theme, motive, subject, title, purpose, are not synonymous, either with each other or with germinal idea. To clear up this vagueness it may be well to explain each of these terms by illustration in a single story.

The story is briefly as follows: Four outcasts, among whom as leader is a well-known gambler, on their way from one village to another are held for a week snow-bound on a mountain on which they had unnecessarily stopped to rest. They all meet death before help reaches them. The title of this story is *The Outcasts of Poker Flat;* the subject, how four outcasts met their death in a mountain snow-storm. The purpose is to show the essential soundness of heart which may coexist with outward, conventional badness. The theme is the acceptance of chance as a controlling motive. Motive

is that which controls the individual actor. The Duchess had a motive in halting the journey; Oakhurst had a motive for wishing the continuance of the journey; Uncle Billy had a motive for departing with the mules; Mother Shipton had a motive in refusing to eat her share of the provisions. The germinal idea may have been one of several things; perhaps an incident, perhaps an impression of the wild lawlessness of a California mining camp, or of the calculating nature of John Oakhurst. The difference between these terms is, perhaps, now obvious. The *title* is the name by which a story is distinguished. The *subject* is the statement, in narrative terms, of what the story is about. The *purpose* is the writer's object in telling a particular story. The *theme* is the basic fact upon which the plot of the story hinges. *Motive*, sometimes the borrowed musical term *motif*, is commonly used as the equivalent of theme. Yet motive in this sense is misleading, for it is applied as well to the unseen spring of action for an individual. *Motive* is that which leads a certain person to act in a certain way under certain given circumstances. Yet the so-called motive of a story involves an interplay of motives of the characters. Thus *title* and *subject*, *purpose*, *theme*, and *motive*, though allied, are essentially distinct.

The germinal idea is, however, none of these. It is the bare, undeveloped idea [1] from which the

[1] "An idea arrives without effort; a form can only be wrought out by patient labor." Henry van Dyke, Preface to 1901 edition of *The Other Wise Man*.

imagination receives its original thrill. It is essentially the starting-point of a story. It is not the beginning of the actual plotting any more than it is of the actual writing. It is that which first awakens the consciousness of a writer to a possible story. It is a mere suggestion from which a story may in time grow. One cannot be sure that a germinal idea will ever be fruitful. Occasionally, it may be utilized at once; frequently it will be dormant in the mind for weeks and then suddenly become active; sometimes it must be coaxed into activity by long reflection. Rarely does the germinal idea reveal just what sort of story may result, since it is but seldom that a whole story presents itself at once. The germinal idea may or may not be presented along with certain features of its development. It is indefinite in quantity; perhaps a word, possibly a whole plot. Sometimes, too, it may prove mistaken seed, — very good, perhaps, for an essay or a sketch, but unavailable for a Short-story. Not every germinal idea has its Short-story, but every Short-story has its germinal idea. For such productive idea, search must be painstakingly kept up. In this chapter, then, we shall try to treat of the germinal idea in its variety and sources, and of the principles which will govern its possible growth toward plot.

The beginner's first question is always, What shall I write about? It is, indeed, a vexing question. Seated comfortably in his chair, he stares for an hour blankly at ceiling and side-wall and carpet;

then turns to gaze distractedly out of the window into the tree-tops. Or a maiden wistfully watches a sunset and expects something astounding or beautiful to flash across her mind, — a well-developed story idea. It is little wonder that these amateurs grumble, for they have failed to look understandingly. Beside the one, there may lie, spread out on the floor, a daily newspaper, and on the front of it there may be a cartoon with the picture of a man pleading for re-election, and against all charges of indiscretion and unfitness urging simply, "I want to die in the harness." The girl, too, failed to catch the scrap of conversation of two women who passed the window, and she did not notice the pained expression on the face of the delivery man as he hurried around the house. There is no repository in ceiling or carpet, in sunset or tree-tops, from which the aspiring young Short-story writer may draw at will. He may not scrutinize a catalogue and then order C.O.D. ten pounds of Early Grand Success Short-story seeds. These seeds are free to him who seeks them with open eyes and zealous carefulness, for they are scattered all about him.

If, then, the writer will train himself in thoughtfulness and observation, he will soon have story-germs of all kinds. An incident, an imagined situation, a statement of abstract truth, some title, some passing impression, — any one of these may serve as a germinal idea. Although the usual method of finding story-germs may vary for different people,

perhaps the most frequent story-germ for all people alike is incident. It appeals because it is already narrative. To imagine its story possibilities is generally easier than to see possibilities in something which does not of itself make a narrative appeal. This incident may be some personal experience or the experience of a friend; it may be actual fact; it may be an imagined occurrence; it may be a suggestive historical event or incident — such as the hanging of a spy during the Civil War, or the quelling of a riot on a city street.

Situations real or imagined, too, are frequently story-germs. These situations may be simply expressed in the abstract with the character *a* man, *a* woman, *a* child; or they may regard some definite person under certain definite circumstances. Hawthorne used both sorts, yet usually his situations were indefinite. A few chosen from his *American Note-Books* will serve as examples:

"An old looking-glass. Somebody finds out the secret of making all the images that have been reflected in it pass back again to its surface."

"A partially insane man to believe himself the Provincial Governor or other great official of Massachusetts. The scene might be the Province House."

"A company of persons to drink a certain medicinal preparation, which would prove a poison or the contrary according to their different characters."

"Some man of powerful character to command a person, morally subjected to him, to perform some act. The commanding person suddenly to

die; and for all the rest of his life, the subjected one continues to perform that act."

"A father confessor — his reflections on character, and the contrast of the inward man with the outward, as he looks around on his congregation, all whose secret sins are known to him."

"A person to be the death of his beloved in trying to raise her to more than mortal perfection; yet this should be a comfort to him for having aimed so highly and holily." In this situation, one recognizes the finished story, *The Birthmark.*

"Two persons to be expecting some occurrence, and watching for the two principal actors in it, and to find that the occurrence is even then passing, and that they themselves are the two actors."

"Two persons, by mutual agreement, to make their wills in each other's favor, then to wait impatiently for one another's death, and both to be informed of the desired event at the same time. Both, in most joyous sorrow, hasten to be present at the funeral, meet, and find themselves hoaxed."

"A change from a gay young girl to an old woman; the melancholy events, the effects of which have clustered around her character, and gradually imbued it with their influence till she becomes a lover of sick-chambers, taking pleasure in receiving dying breaths and in laying out the dead; also having her mind full of funeral reminiscences, and possessing more acquaintances beneath the burial turf than above it."

Hawthorne's story situations were of the morbid

and the fanciful. In that respect they are not good examples for the beginner, who would almost surely make a failure of them. Yet they serve to show how slight may be the germinal idea upon which a story may be constructed. To develop a story based upon a bare situation requires a strong creative imagination.

Simple impressions, likewise, of character, of action, or of setting may be germinal ideas. So definitely does character write itself in one's appearance that a face may stir one's narrative imagination. A kindly open face may suggest one thing; a pinched, pale, but kindly face another; and a dark, lowering countenance and restless eyes, yet another. Each one of us, however young and inexperienced, has seen some faces, perhaps in the waiting-room of a railroad station, which have remained distinctly in memory and have more than once challenged the imagination. Perhaps it may have been the face of a nun, or of a tavern-keeper, of a peddler, or of a woman whose eyes had gazed so long upon a forest lake that they seemed to reflect its blueness and its dancing wildness. A person's mannerisms, his mode of dressing, his carriage might all suggest stories. For instance, a student who walked with head erect and eyes always directed ahead, whose feet seemed always to be placed precisely on the same two rows of bricks on the walk, who always turned corners sharply, might suggest to his associates a person who could scarcely cope with any great change. Imagine that person then facing some

decided change and a story would result. Watch a person's dealings with a clerk in a store, notice passing remarks, and one will often gain vivid impressions of character which may be fruitful for stories. "A face seen in a crowd, gossip overheard in a tavern, a conversation at a street door, the revelations of hostile eyes in meeting or parting, the sudden passing of insignificant men and women across the beam of his questing searchlight — these are enough to excite his imagination, to start the wheels of fantasy; and if he will but continue to see vividly the dramatic possibilities of life, and to report truthfully what he sees, he need never lack material for the warp and woof of the stories he can spin." [1]

An impression may be of setting. The setting itself might be of use in a story, but it might simply create an impression. A large hotel set in beautiful grounds at a summer resort is deserted. Stacks of dishes stand on the tables, doors are ajar, beds are thrown open, but left unmade, a bottle of whisky, half-used, stands in a cupboard, dishes of dried-up ice-cream are left on stands in the hallways, the registry book lies on the desk, the window-shades are not drawn. This setting might or might not be used in a story, but undoubtedly it stirs one's imagination. Instinctively one asks, What happened here? On the other hand, Stevenson was impressed by the wildness of the sea and rocks in Sandag Bay; from the impression he created *The Merry Men.*

[1] W. J. Dawson (1909), *North American Review*, 190: p. 805.

The setting became a vital part of his story, not just a stimulation to the imagination.[1] In *A Gossip on Romance*, Stevenson has said: "One thing in life calls for another; there is a fitness in events and places. The sight of a pleasant arbour puts it in our mind to sit there. One place suggests work, another idleness, a third early rising and long rambles in the dew. The effect of night, of any flowing water, of lighted cities, of the peep of day, of ships, of the open ocean, calls up in the mind an army of anonymous desires and pleasures. Something, we feel, should happen; we know not what, yet we proceed in quest of it. And many of the happiest hours of life fleet by us in this vain attendance on the genius of the place and moment. . . . Some places speak distinctly. Certain dank gardens cry aloud for a murder; certain old houses demand to be haunted; certain coasts are set apart for shipwreck. Other spots again seem to abide their destiny, suggestive and impenetrable, 'miching mallecho.' The inn at Burford Bridge with its arbours and green garden and silent, eddying river . . . still seems to wait the coming of the appropriate legend. Without these ivied walls, behind these old green shutters some further business smoulders, waiting for its hour. The old Hawes Inn at the Queen's Ferry makes a similar call upon my fancy.

[1] Hawthorne realized clearly the value of setting as a germinal idea. Here again is one of his notes: "The scene of a story or sketch to be laid within the light of a street lantern; the time, when the lamp is near going out; and the catastrophe to be simultaneous with the last flickering gleam."

. . . So it is with names and faces; so it is with incidents that are idle and inconclusive in themselves, and yet seem like the beginning of some quaint romance, which the all-careless author leaves untold. How many of these romances have we not seen determine at their birth; how many people have met us with a look of meaning in their eye, and sunk at once into trivial acquaintances; to how many places have we not drawn near, with express intimations — 'here my destiny awaits me' — and we have but dined there and passed on! I have lived both at the Hawes and Burford in a perpetual flutter, on the heels, as it seemed, of some adventure that should justify the place; but though the feeling led me to bed at night and called me again at morning in one unbroken round of pleasure and suspense, nothing befell me in either worth remark. The man of the hour had not yet come; but some day, I think, a boat shall put off from the Queen's Ferry, fraught with a dear cargo, and some frosty night a horseman, on a tragic errand, rattle with his whip upon the green shutters of the inn at Burford."

Again, the germinal idea may be a mood, a passing fancy, a contrast of some kind, an illustration, even a name appropriate to a main character. A title may come to one with suggestive force and demand for itself a fitting story, for, as we shall see later,[1] every title should be to a certain degree suggestive of the story it heads. To some minds, the

[1] For the full discussion of title see chapter VI.

title is frequently the story-germ; others make it even the last touch in the building of a story. The bare statement of a truth; a proverb; perhaps, a moral; the theme, which is the very heart of a story, may at times appear as germinal ideas. These occur, however, not at all frequently, and with good reason; for a truth or proverb is a summation of experience, not an inspiration to experience. It may enforce by causing reflection, but it rarely stirs the imagination creatively. A proverb would have to be analyzed into its facts before it could begin to take shape as a story. To use it as a germinal idea seems a little like the process of pulling an alarm-clock to pieces for the sheer joy of putting it together again. Yet to some, even these abstractions might prove valuable — particularly to those whose aim is to teach a lesson or point a moral.

Experience and reading are the two great sources of material. Under experience, one should include not only that which is actual and personal, but that which is observed. If one is to write, one must see. It is true here as elsewhere that "familiarity breeds contempt." One is generally on the lookout for the striking and interesting away from home. Diaries are full of such records. Yet rarely does one notice the things that are easily under one's eye. Their nearness seems commonly to presuppose insignificance. The Short-story writer, nevertheless, "gets his material from nature and human life," [1] which are just as true and interesting in the

[1] Charity Dye, *The Story-Teller's Art*, p. 21.

spot where he lives, in the business in which he is occupied, as they would be in a cannibal-inhabited island on the far side of the world. Everywhere man is contending, whether with his fellow-man, or with nature, or with himself. One cannot always witness the struggle, but one can watch the effects, can study the motives, and note the forces gathering for the conflict.

"Queer things are happening all around us, if we have eyes to see them as queer or interesting events."[1] This power to see and understand may be, indeed must be, developed until the writer becomes almost a magnet for Short-story ideas. His imagination must become so sensitive that even commonplaces will set him to thinking in a narrative direction, and this can happen only when the writer moves in the midst of life and responds sympathetically to life's emotions. He must be in tune. "In the very beginning of his work, then, the story-writer must lay his senses open to the world about him. He must observe the speech and actions of his fellow-men, study their expressions, reflect upon their character, sympathetically interpret motives, leaping over the bridge of personality and making common cause with other people's feelings. And eventually he must be able to reproduce on the stage of his own mind something of that wonderful interaction by which we human beings are woven and interwoven into the complex web of humanity."[2] "All the earth is full

[1] Sherwin Cody, *Story-writing and Journalism*, pp. 40–41.
[2] Albright, *The Short-story*, p. 17.

of tales to him who listens and does not drive away the poor from his door. The poor are the best of tale-tellers; for they must lay their ear to the ground every night." [1]

Much of one's personal experience, also, is rich as a seed-plot of germinal ideas. Experience, be it crucial or trivial, is interesting, — at least, to the person who has had it. One has real emotions with which to deal, undoubted motives, actual events whose causes may be definitely traced. An incident itself may be inspiration enough. Much, however, of one's daily experience becomes suggestive through reflection. Every day we are all turning over in our minds incident after incident. We change here a cause, there a motive; the outcome is different. Suddenly one starts in astonishment; for there, perhaps, is a story one had never suspected. Thus even the details may become significant for material. Even a dream, if vivid and remembered, may contain a germinal idea. Suppose a person be required to serve a jail sentence in three-hour periods, one period each day. It is easy to see how, if the sentence be long, the suffering of the man enduring it might be acute. This situation is, of course, extremely improbable. It is but a dream situation, yet it might have narrative possibilities. Every one has some small store, at least, of vivid and valuable story material within his own experience. One need not be a restless globe-trotter, nor busied with many

[1] Kipling, Preface to *Life's Handicap*. Quoted by J. B. Esenwein, *Studying the Short-story*, p. 148.

interests, to gain such material. The man who spends all his years in his native village, the workman who day after day guides an electric gimlet in a factory, may also find in actual life the germs of possible stories.

One need not depend entirely upon experience, observed or personal, so long as one can read. The sciences, as physics, chemistry, geology, psychology, mechanics, are rich in suggestions for stories of strange and unusual phenomena. History, especially biography, ought to be valuable as source material. Take in one life all the undeveloped situations — those which never reached any definite result; take the developed situations and realize their possibilities in other lives under utterly different circumstances, and one should reap a harvest of story material. Better than all of these, however, for the hunting of ideas, is the daily newspaper. Its supply is exhaustless. There, one may find an actual incident such as may be in itself useful, an incident which may suggest a situation. Headlines, cartoons, even want advertisements or "lost" notices may be enough to start ideas. From the first page to the last, at the bottom of a page or at the top, in fine print or in bold type — anywhere, except perhaps in real-estate and insurance notes, the obituary columns and marriage-license department, or in the stock-exchange and market quotings, germinal ideas may be hidden. Equipped with a newspaper, even a local newspaper, a notebook, and an imagination, one should not suffer for lack of story-ideas.

To gather story-ideas is one thing; to develop a story from a bare idea is quite another. From among the many ideas that present themselves, one must be chosen. This one may have several manifestations; from it, several different stories might result. One must first test the germinal idea for its possible manifestations and then choose that one which will make the most worthy story. One must ask whether the story might be exclusively of action, of character, or setting; whether it might allow development into a character story, an action story, a setting story; whether it might be a psychological story, a problem story, a story of symbolism. If the germinal idea is a character hint, one should decide what sort of character is to be represented. Could any other sort be suggested by this idea? In what ways would the character be revealed? In what different circumstances might he be placed? Are any of these circumstances essentially dramatic; that is, will they yield a plot? Should the germinal idea be an incident, one should ask a different set of questions. Is this incident the basis of an action story? Is it significant of anything? Is it dramatic? Could it serve as the main incident of a story? Is it perhaps a minor incident of some other story? If so, of what kind of story? What sort of characters would be necessary? Could it be a character story or a story of setting? Thus, whatever the idea, its possible manifestations must be tested before one can conclude what is the one best way of telling the story.

A germinal idea capable of several different story manifestations might, notwithstanding, fail to result in a worthy Short-story. H. G. Wells has said that a Short-story may be "as trivial as a Japanese print of insects seen closely between grass stems or as spacious as the prospect of the plain of Italy from Monte Mottarone." The germinal idea may be trivial. "Yet the Short-story has been raised into literature only in those fortunate times when skill, or the circumstances of the moment, have given its slight fabric a serious purpose, a worthy substance, or consummate art. It can be light, it can be graceful, it can be amusing, it can be airy. But triviality kills it." [1] In other words, one must have for one's story a telling theme, — such a theme as bears closely on some deep-rooted fact of human nature. Without this theme a story might be perfect technically, yet fail to "capture the mind of the reader" or "make his heart really throb with anxiety about the result." [2]

"The peculiar note of the Short-story at its best is the importance of the individual soul, be the surroundings of the humblest, or the most sordid. It is the heroism, the futility, the humor, the pathos, the inherent worth and beauty of life in the narrowest circumstances, that are the themes of the great writers of the Short-story." [3] Even though a story

[1] Canby, *A Study of the Short-story*, pp. 75–6.

[2] Blaisdell, *Composition-Rhetoric*, p. 268.

[3] E. C. Black, *The Future of the Short-story: International Monthly*, 1: 205–216 (p. 214).

may be possessed of the glamour of the Orient, and interest through its novelty, it must reflect the sadness and the gladness, the hopelessness and optimism of human endeavor, if it would live in the hearts of men. It must not be unimportant.

The Short-story is limited in another way: it must be new and striking, or no one would ever care to read it. The first aim of a magazine article is to instruct; that of the Short-story is to entertain. It may be based on an old theme, but it must be told in a new way. People are easily bored; they do not care to hear the same thing over and over again without variation. "Hackneyed subjects now and then are treated in so original a manner as to bring the whole story above the commonplace level, but that is a performance too unusual for even a genius to dally with often. Editors and public tired long ago of the poor boy whose industry at last brought him the hand of his employer's daughter; the pale-faced, sweet-eyed young thing whose heroism in stamping out the fire enabled her to pay off the mortgage; the recovery of the missing will; the cruel stepmother; answering a prayer which has been overheard; the strange case of mistaken identity; honesty rewarded; a noble revenge; a child's influence; and so on to a long-drawn-out end." [1] A Short-story must make one think. A hackneyed subject follows the already deep groove in one's brain. It cuts no new track. One's fingers playing the scale of C for the one hundredth time

[1] J. B. Esenwein, *Writing the Short-story*, pp. 45–6.

move up the keyboard without the conscious direction of the mind. If, however, one plays the scale of D major for the first time in contrary motion, one thinks. If a story is to make an impression, it must be new and striking; it must stimulate thought.

Because a theme is important and because its development must stimulate thought, there is no reason that it should stir up dispute. Argumentation has no part in a story. It may convince the reason; of itself it will never convince the feeling. Furthermore, as Mr. Pitkin says: "Do not attempt to interpret any matter which society finds problematic to-day. If the human race has not yet found a clear answer to a question of social consequence, it is because the question is entangled and dark, or, at least, two-sided. And whatever is so cannot be presented in such a manner as to produce that *single effect* which is the inalienable charm and right of the Short-story." [1] One might relate a dramatic war incident; one should hesitate, however, to attempt to prove in a Short-story that war should be eliminated. One might tell of the appearance of a mouse on the platform during a woman-suffrage meeting; one should not try to show that woman-suffrage is a good or an evil. One may approach so close that the problem will be raised in the mind of the reader, but one should not enter into the problem itself.

It is but little less dangerous to try to use a trite or disputed theme than it is to try to write about something concerning which one knows nothing.

[1] Pitkin, *Short-story Writing*, p. 58.

A girl could rarely write a successful story of politics, for usually she lacks intimate knowledge. A person who had spent his whole life in Nebraska would rarely write a successful story of an ocean voyage. Unless he had read widely, and perhaps even if he had, he would be almost sure to make absurd blunders which would betray his inexperience. No more ought an Ohioan without experience in the mountains to try to write a story of the Rockies or of Alaska. An easterner generally makes his wild west a great deal too wild. If one wishes to write a story whose plot is laid on the Sahara Desert or in Constantinople, he needs to be pretty sure that he knows his region before he begins. College students are living in a unique environment, yet ordinarily, instead of accepting the material at hand and writing of the complications of college life, they prefer to stretch their imaginations across states, if not across the length and breadth of a continent, for the sake of novelty. Kipling wrote of India, Bret Harte, of California, and we all wish to go and do likewise. Kipling, however, knew his India through intimate experience. Bret Harte knew his California. Therein is a difference. If one must write of the unfamiliar, one should read, study his chosen environment until he can live there imaginatively as easily as he can in flesh and blood at home. Then he should make the environment as colorless as possible. He may thus avoid glaring mistakes. The same principle applies to stories written with an historical background. They must be handled carefully, if at all. After all,

it is easier to write of one's own country, one's own surroundings, and one's own time.

The reader, however, enjoys novelty — of all sorts; novelty of treatment, novelty of character, novelty of incident, novelty of setting. It is true, of course, that underneath all this strangeness he does wish to behold the sameness of human nature at its root. It is certain that he likes to be able to say at times, "I might have done that," or "I once had an experience something like that." He likes to see his own motives and manners mirrored, just as he boosts his pride a little whenever the name of his forsaken hamlet is mentioned in a city paper. Yet familiarity may at length grow tiresome. We are all interested in what other people are like, what they are doing, what strange adventures they have had. We like to know what other people have done that we have never succeeded in doing, and, at times, we like, as did the Pharisee, to congratulate ourselves that we "are not as other men." Thus the story depicting the life and manners of men and women the like of which we have never known, has a perennial interest. Kipling has said: "Tell them first of those things that thou hast seen and they have seen together. Thus their knowledge will piece out thy imperfections. Tell them of what thou alone hast seen, then what thou hast heard, and since they be children, tell them of battles and kings, horses, devils, elephants, and angels, but omit not to tell them of love and such like." [1]

[1] Kipling, Preface to *Life's Handicap*. Quoted by J. B. Esenwein, *Studying the Short-story*, p. 148.

After one has found a story which is not trivial, not hackneyed, not polemic, but is of genuine interest, one has yet to settle upon one's purpose. To have a purpose in writing a story is not the same as to point a moral. Only when theme and purpose merge so that the one is merely the expression of the other is the resulting story really didactic. For instance, in the story referred to at the opening of this chapter, *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, if Bret Harte had taken as his purpose to show that the acceptance of chance as a controlling motive is sure to bring disastrous results, he would have made theme and purpose identical; his story would have been didactic. Fortunately, however, he did not do this. His theme and purpose are distinct, and a just balance is kept between them. A story may, indeed, allow several purposes, and as the purpose varies, so also will the story. Does one care simply to give a humorous presentation of life? Does the story lend itself to such treatment? Does one wish to show a contrast or to portray vividly the characteristics of one locality or business? Or, does one have a more serious purpose, to show the nobility of human nature or the baseness to which sin may lead? Of course, purpose may be determined absolutely by the nature of the story itself. If so, the writer might as well accept it, or hunt for a new story-idea.

At this early stage, too, it is wise to determine, at least in a general way, upon the single impression that is to be left upon the reader, and upon the prevailing tone of the story: whether it be of gloom, ex-

pectancy, joy; of wildness or calm; of genial warmth and friendliness; of bleakness and misfortune; perhaps of miserliness. In choosing a single impression or tone, it will be necessary to take into account its acceptability to the reader and its adaptability to the theme. In the matter of acceptability, one must depend on one's good sense and general observation. Nowadays, however, joy is generally preferred to horror, and warmth of tone to coldness. By the control of adaptability is meant that the writer must always be guided by his story. He cannot work free-handed, for the single impression is always determined by and determines the climax.

III

PLOT

A STORY may be exceedingly interesting, yet, unless it has plot, it will never be a Short-story. Occasionally, one sees a garden where overgrown rose-bushes, rhubarb plants, hollyhocks, hop-vines, and tiger-lilies run riot over one another. There is no order, no grouping, no massing. Each plant looks as if it had been ignominiously pitched from the doorstep and had taken root where it fell. Not even has the principle of the survival of the fittest availed to bring order out of chaos, for all plants seem equally fit. The effect of such planting is unsatisfying and bizarre. One longs for pruning-shears and a spade. The same plants arranged without a semblance of artificiality, in an orderly manner, might be of real, ornamental value. No more does one admire a house the number of whose owners can be estimated by the number of additions tacked on, one behind the other. One admires rather a house built with unity according to a harmonized plan. The Short-story plot, though different from that of the larger narrative forms, is none the less real and vital. It requires a careful selection and rearrangement of materials for a definite pattern. It is also a working out of the laws of cause and

effect. It is not a haphazard pitching together of incident and character until a fitting momentous event is found with which to finish off a story. It is not something accidental, but something thought out and prepared for. In it there is represented, not a succession of events, but a series where the relation of each incident to that which immediately precedes or to that which directly follows is clear and necessary. No loose ends are allowed; for in plot the weaving is compact and sure. Each event comes in order, because it grows logically out of a preceding event. Each part bears a distinct relation to the whole and has a definite work. Plot is somewhat like a system of cogs: each part so works into the next part that it is actually necessary to the movement of that part. The value of the whole will be lost unless the parts are consistent and adapted throughout. A plot is artistic just as a washing-machine or a demonstration of a geometrical proposition is artistic. Neither is of itself burdened with ornament, but each is artistic in so far as it is adapted for the most complete service. For plot, this service is to attain through climax a single narrative effect. Although but an unfilled outline, it is essentially complete in itself — a garden laid out ready to receive its roses and hollyhocks in their places.

For this reason, true stories rarely make of themselves perfect plots. They must be transformed by imagination and reason. A true story is told ordinarily because it is in some sense extraordinary.

One passes it over without comment, unless it is striking and unusual. Now a true story may be fruitful as a source of plot, yet in its first form its parts are rarely consistent. The law of cause and effect is, of course, working just as truly in the sphere of the actual as it is in the realm of the imagined; yet, in the actual, causes are frequently hidden under the mass of details and irrelevant matter. In the imagined they have been bared, and events stand out in their true relationships. A true story might suppose a thoroughly upright man suddenly become an embezzler. When one applies reason to this true-story idea, one can readily see its absurdity. A thoroughly upright man could not be an embezzler. Either he must have been all the time but feignedly upright, or some sudden change has occurred in his character. When one has adopted one or the other of these two suppositions, one can then develop a reasonable story — ideally true, although not in apparent accord with the facts as reported. Imagination fills in what fact has passed over; it supplies the hidden motives and makes in the end a complete and consistent story. The true story but startles and leaves one with a feeling of its incompleteness. It is often said that fact may be stranger than fiction. Its strangeness may be its peril, not its hope. Fact may display no logical relation of parts; fiction always does. To be sure, plot works with imaginative material, but it requires that this material be shaped toward a predetermined end

by the application of reason; for the parts of the story must be always "logical, adequate and harmonious."

This plot, in the Short-story, is nevertheless simple and may be exceedingly slight. The Short-story deals with a simplification of life; hence, complexity is foreign to its nature. Brevity and unity of impression both seem practically impossible to the complex plot. Yet one rather naturally associates complexity with any idea of plot whatsoever; one thinks it essential. A thousand threads are inextricably woven into the pattern of life. Thus, in imitation, the makers of the novel and the drama have used various threads; they have bound together in one climax several groups of characters, several conflicting actions. Yet the narrower, more restricted plot of the Short-story is still a design and involves an entanglement of threads. A trolling line may become so tied up in itself that an hour must be spent in its disentanglement. So it is, also, in the field of narrative. A simple group of characters, comprising with incident but a single action, may be knotted together in climax; each part itself acts as a thread. The result is a plot not at all inferior to that of the larger forms. Simplicity, instead of becoming a weakness, has become, indeed, the strength of the Short-story plot. Where many threads are entangled, one's mind becomes distracted. Impressions flicker for a moment and are gone. One starts along one path, and, behold, one finds oneself hurrying along

another. In the Short-story, however, there can be no hesitation, no turning aside into new byways. The effect is single and more powerful than that of the complex plot. A tree with a long tap-root goes deep into the soil, and gains greater power than does a tree whose roots branch and rebranch near the surface. A plot concentrated on one action is sure to strike deep into one's mind.

Yet, one says, the simple plot is, at least, less natural than the broad plot, for it works with events in isolation. One must remember, however, that the novelist sits down and thinks out the ramifications of life, arranges innumerable complications in the quiet of his study, disposes his characters in arbitrary ways. A man's life is, of course, filled with these complications; but, after all, a man usually settles only one question at a time. He does things with a single motive without taking into consideration how his action is going to affect his own life and other lives, perhaps years after. He may not live for the present moment, but he certainly lives *in* the present moment. He is a little like gunpowder: he goes off of a sudden — at a single thwack of a hammer. The Short-story writer takes for granted that incidents and episodes connected, to be sure, yet each separate, make up the chain of man's existence. The attitudes of the two plot-builders are essentially different. Each attitude is correct in its own way. The one regards man as a creature caught hand and foot in the meshes of society; the other sees him as an

individual working out through quick motive and act his own destiny and that of society in general. Both views are equally true; but the latter seems indeed the more lifelike, for it represents a man's life in stages each with its own climax.

The essential of good plot is climax; the materials are character and action. It is the business of plot to find how these two elements can be most effectively played against each other for climax. The strength of neither can be measured by itself, for it is estimated by its moving force, its power in conflict. Character is uncertain until it has met an obstacle. Action is uninteresting except as it comes into relation with men and women. A hurricane in an uninhabited part of the earth does not intimately concern us where we dwell. It is mere waste force. In the Short-story, however, there must be no waste force. Character and action react against each other, and the result is climax. In the progress of the story the relationship of character and action is changed. Something must happen to the characters, and characters must do something to further or check the action. There must be an interweaving of materials, else there can be no design, no plot. "In other words, every story whose excellence is generally admitted is more than a picture of character, more than a good complication, more than a fragment of biography, and more than an exciting episode. *It is all these together*, and in it they are so arranged that the reader is *surprised* by what happens *to* the hero,

and *thrilled* by what the hero does *to* each situation. This thrill is the thrill of drama, only if the hero somehow exhibits his human nature *by conduct in a crisis.*" [1]

Since the focus of a story is the climax, the construction of a plot should always begin there. If one centers one's attention on the climax, one can be sure that the intermediate parts of the design will be logical. If one starts at the other end, one cannot be so sure; for it is easier to trace an effect to its cause than it is to trace a cause to its effect. One should begin the work of construction, then, with climax. Now, the climax is very near to the end in the Short-story. It is the point of highest suspense to which everything has been leading. Its effect would be lost, if it were to be followed by extended conclusions. In the drama, however, the climax is at the middle of the story. It is the point of contact of all the several single actions. From it, there is a gradual untying towards a resolution at the end. In the Short-story, the climax and the resolution are practically simultaneous. There is no need of any extended untying, for the complication is within a single action. The complication is not of itself of sufficient importance to be interesting. Interest is all directed towards that which happens as a result of complication. This point of highest interest, this happening, this outcome, is the climax of the Short-story.

"But what is the climax? Sometimes, the *incident*

[1] Pitkin, *Short-story Writing*, p. 28.

towards which all the episodes led, which collected, like a brass globe, all the electric charge of emotion, thought, or vivid impression to be drawn from the story. Sometimes, and much oftenest, the situation, which had been the root and first perception of the tale, and now, in this climax, was most sharply revealed. But among those Short-stories which differ most thoroughly from ordinary short narrative, or from the novel with its different view-point, a single impression, a vivid realization for the reader of that which moved the author to write, be it incident, be it emotion, be it situation, this is the conscious purpose of the story, and this is the climax." [1] Yet every climax, be it a single impression or a vivid realization, must have its outward expression. In *They*, the climax is reached when the spirit-child drops a kiss in the center of the man's outstretched palm. It seems, indeed, an insignificant action, yet is a part of the subtle atmosphere which shapes the story. The real climax is, however, not the act of the child, but the sudden realization of loss which comes to the blind woman. All in a moment, she realizes that this man is accorded a privilege which she with all her love for children can never have, — for she has "neither borne nor lost." Thus is the climax stamped upon the main character. It is no less moving for the accessory character. Up to this time he moved through an atmosphere full of sunshine, flitting shadows, and faint echoes; he has been enwrapped

[1] H. S. Canby, *The Short-story in English*, p. 303.

in the loveliness of mystery. Now, in a moment of anguish, his eyes are undimmed; the truth flashes across his mind and he understands. The act of the spirit-child marked indeed the climax, but the climax was happening in the hearts of the characters. Again, the climax may be a simple remark which constitutes a revelation or a revenge. In Maupassant's *The Necklace*, it is a single remark, "Why, my necklace was paste. It was worth at most only five hundred francs." It is the last crushing blow to Madame Loisel. Although a climax may be expressed in almost any way, it is always in harmony with the nature of the story. The climax of a character story will show this character in some sort of crisis. It may be an incident showing a positive change in condition or circumstances, it may be a decision, even a thought. If action predominates, the climax will be some incident; if setting, then this will rise to its height in climax. In short, climax and single impression must be in absolute harmony.

The climax must be prepared for by a complication — some obstacle to the uninterrupted progress of the story must present itself. Yet an obstacle is not enough to cause climax. Suppose that one were driving in the country and expected to reach certain picnic grounds at a certain time, and suppose that just before the end, one should be confronted by a fence. This fence would be an obstacle to one's further progress. One might turn back and retrace the course; but then, one would fail

to reach the picnic grounds. Nothing would have been gained. Suppose, now, that a gate should be noticed in the fence at this point. One needs now only to stop long enough to fling it open before one continues the journey. The fence, in such a case, is no real obstacle at all; it does not actually offer resistance to further progress; it merely delays progress. Now, suppose one had the chance neither of turning back nor of passing through the gate. The obstacle becomes at once real. Ordinary modes of procedure will avail not at all. Something extraordinary must happen. One will have to break the fence and incur the wrath of the owner. In the Short-story, circumstances are much the same: there must be an obstacle, an unavoidable obstacle; for there can be no turning back from a difficulty in the path. The difficulty is a necessary part of the story. Progression, too, rapid progression toward an end, is necessary. One must always move straight ahead in the direction of the climax. Nor can one be satisfied by finding an obstacle which can be easily set aside. Such an obstacle would create an anti-climax. The end would be so easy of attainment that it would fail to arouse interest. There would be no element of real suspense, and without suspense there can be no Short-story.

If the obstacle is real and unavoidable, it will cause a conflict of some kind. This is perfectly evident. If two motor-cycles going in opposite directions should, in rounding a corner, run straight

into each other, each might be called an obstacle for the other. Something would be sure to happen. One of the motor-cycles might escape slightly impaired, or be utterly smashed. Both might be destroyed and their riders left unceremoniously sprawling in a cornfield. Here is conflict resulting in some definite action. In the Short-story, however, when two forces conflict, one does not ordinarily expect complete annihilation of both. It is not certain, however, that the obstacle will always be crushed and the story move on straight thereafter. Sometimes the obstacle is the victor and the story must move on impaired to its conclusion. In this case climax and conflict coincide. It is always to be borne in mind that obstacle is not the conflict, but the cause of conflict. This obstacle may be a character, — since action may result from character as well as from incident. Anything that for the moment gets in the way of the free course of the story is an obstacle and gives rise to a conflict.

The next requirement is that one construct circumstances which will lead up to complication and climax effectively. Everything in the Short-story plot must have movement. Here is no chance to gather flowers by the wayside. Rapidity, directness, governs everything that enters into plot. The circumstances, therefore, must be such that the complication will be the natural, the logical result. Many details which will further the effect may be worked in harmoniously in the later struc-

ture; but in the plot, one is eager to trace only the workings of cause and effect that lead not to the emotional impression, but to the technical, mechanical climax. Thus, in a few rapid sketch strokes, one must set forth definitely that which leads to the complication. In building a story, it is important here to be sure that the circumstances are strong enough actually to justify the complication. Of course, the circumstances may of themselves have several stages. There may be some character trait either in the main character or in the subordinate which may give rise to an event from which in turn the circumstances evolve. The event giving rise to the circumstances might be but a single word, an apparently unimportant decision, yet generally it points backward to some significant characteristic.

Perhaps the first question after one has determined the climax is in regard to the characters of the story. There will have to be a main character. Will a man or a woman be more appropriate to the action? What sort of person shall he be, what his general nature, what his usual business? From what social class shall he be drawn? Approximately, what should be his age? Shall he be simply a colorless figure in the action, or shall he be shown as an individual with peculiar characteristics? Such questions are sure to occur immediately to the Short-story writer. To answer them, one examines the climax, and, as before, the theme and purpose. With these aids and common-sense, one should

have little trouble in determining on a principal character. This chief actor may be even an animal or a thing. .007, in Kipling's story of this name, is a powerful locomotive. While retaining the characteristics of a thing, it is, however, endowed with a sort of personality. Where animals or things become main characters, they are always personified and given human motives; they are moved by selfishness, pride, or ambition, just as are men and women. In a character story, the traits of the chief personage may actually further the movement. In such a case, one needs to determine carefully the nature and habits of the main character. It is essential that the characters should be true to the action, and in every respect consistent with their assigned parts. Setting may carry with it certain associations, and so may characters. However easy it may be to imagine a cook brandishing a carving knife, one would scarcely expect to see a seamstress gripping a revolver. Seamstresses might do for "hard luck" stories or for love stories, but they would surely be ugly ducklings in a sea-faring story. Characters must be, above all, appropriate to the action; they must be chosen because they are the characters best adapted for the purposes of the story.

Somehow, too, every character, to be individual, must be unique. Mere conformity to a type will not suffice. To be sure, one wishes to see a type represented, but yet more, to see an individual. Mere conformity will not mark out a person from

a crowd. A thief might steal apples, but the fact that he had stolen apples does not in itself distinguish this thief from a thousand others who may have done the same thing. Show the sly method this thief had of stealing the apples, and you have revealed all his innate trickiness; you have represented an individual. A main character must do something uniquely expressive of his own personality, else we shall never believe in him as an actual individual. If a character is only consistent in his action, then one cannot be sure of him. He has not been thoroughly tested. After he has been tested, then one knows thoroughly well what he is and what he will do. Naturally, then, the plot-builder will have no superficial acquaintance with his characters. He must know them through and through, must have an instinctive feeling for what they would or would not do, in order to make them appear not merely consistent, but unique.

Rarely will one character suffice for a story. Utter soliloquies are rare and unnatural. Men do not struggle often to themselves. There are always spectators, sympathizers, opponents, or fellow-combatants. These, too, have their share in making a story possible; few of them will be necessary to the plot movement itself. An accessory character may even be the obstacle. Certain effects or conditions of character are often best exhibited in contrast with certain other characters. If a character is played against another of the same general type, he will show to best advantage his

own individuality, his strength, and his weakness. Then, again, it may be well to contrast altogether different types. Sometimes an additional character is necessary in order that a story may be more effectually linked to time and circumstances. Not all accessory characters, however, will ordinarily appear in the bald plot statement; some appear properly only in the fully developed plot — the structure.

In the plot statement, also, there may or may not be expressed the environment. No matter what the story, it must happen somewhere, and it must have some definite time setting. Of course, some stories might happen anywhere. Rather frequently, however, the environment has developed characters of a certain special type, and the things that the characters do, or the things that are done to them, could happen only in this one environment. One of the first matters, then, to be determined about a Short-story is just this: Does the environment really affect the plot movement? If so, one must settle immediately time and place. In the Short-story, time has no definite limits. Usually the time is not more than a day or two. It may be a few minutes or an hour. Sometimes, it extends over practically a whole life.[1] One can watch a certain condition of mind growing throughout a whole life, to find its climax of intensity or change only at

[1] Two examples are Edward Everett Hale's *The Man Without A Country* and August Strindberg's *The Stone Man.* The latter is now available in Velma Swanston Howard's authorized translation, Library Edition, issued by Stewart and Kidd Co., Cincinnati, Ohio.

the last. Only one thread of cause and effect is traced, and the narrative for all its passage of time is but a Short-story. The same principle holds true with reference to place. One part of a story might happen in New Orleans, another part in the Canadian woods. Unity of time and place are not essential to a Short-story. The essential is that the environment be natural and appropriate. It must fit into its place in the plot machinery.

Several illustrations may, perhaps, assist in showing just what constitutes a good plot. Of Thomas Bailey Aldrich's whimsical story, *Marjorie Daw*, the plot is as follows: Wishing to relieve for his friend the tedium of a temporary disablement, a young man writes him suggestively of a girl, — wholly imaginary, — across the street, and is dumbfounded by the result, — a case of passionate love for the unseen charmer and the sudden coming of the convalescent to see and win her. The plot is simple, it is slight. The main character is evidently the disabled friend. The second character is really a part of the machinery of plot. The story could not move without him, yet he is a comparatively colorless individual. He must be displayed with just enough character to be capable of carrying on a ruse such as this is. What of Marjorie Daw, after whom the story is named? She is not a character at all, — but merely a tool. She does nothing, nothing is done to her. She is purely a creation of the mind, a charming dummy. She is the complication, the obstacle of the plot. In the com-

pleted story, other characters appear, but for the plot only two are necessary. Where, in this story, is the climax? Is it the final discovery of the lover that he has been hoaxed, or is it his determination to come to the lovely Marjorie Daw? If the climax is the final exemplification of the theme, and if the theme is, as has been suggested, "the power of ideals," then the man's decision to hasten to her is surely the climax. Suspense really reaches the highest point at this moment, not later; for one's interest has been centered throughout on the question whether or not a real love-affair is going to spring up. That question must be settled before one can consider the other, — whether or not he will win her. It is noteworthy that with the end of suspense there is no end of interest. Interest does not decline till the last word of the *dénouement* is said, till one has felt the fulness of the final surprise which this plot is bound to bring with it. Tension may be relieved without any letting go of interest. The climax here has merely relieved the tension. The circumstances leading to the complication are the letters which must be written continuously, — letters which must interest the recipient. The cause of the circumstances which lead to the complication appears, likewise, in this plot. The friend is disabled. Environment is not necessary to the plot. This incident might happen anywhere. To be sure, it is given an environment, but this does not appear in the simple plot statement; for it is not essential to movement.

The simple plot of *The Revolt of Mother* is: A wife deliberately moves into a large new barn built by her self-willed, thoughtless, and stern husband on a spot long cherished for a promised new house. The main character, the wife, is plainly indicated. Nothing is said of her, except that she has long cherished the promise of a new house and that she moves into the barn deliberately. Her husband, an accessory character, is more carefully characterized. Evidently this story is to reveal character in conflict. A strong will is going to be pitted against another strong will. The climax is the moving. The complication, the cause of bringing the two characters into conflict, is the building of a new barn. The circumstances which lead to the complication are to be found in the character of the husband, his sternness and thoughtlessness of his promise of a new house. Here, circumstances amount almost to a negative motive.

Kipling's *The Man Who Would Be King* is very different from either of the two preceding stories. Having persuaded the natives of Kafiristan to regard them as gods suddenly come into the country, two crown-ambitious men remain as kings until one of them, seeking greater security of power for himself, by his wishing to take from among the people a wife, reveals that he and his friend are but men, and brings death upon himself and disgraceful expulsion upon his companion. This plot is more complex than any yet examined. The climax is the revelation to the natives that the two men are

not gods. From that moment they cease even to be kings. What follows is only their punishment. The complication is the desire of the leader to take a wife. The circumstances leading to the complication are found again in the nature of the central character. He becomes increasingly ambitious and wishes to rule as a permanent monarch. It is plain at once that the story demands several characters. The natives of Kafiristan appear as a background. The central character is the king who through lack of prudence causes the complete fall of himself and of his friend. From the plot, very little is known of him except that he is in the beginning crown-ambitious, and, as time goes on, becomes yet more so. The companion is, likewise, crown-ambitious, but he is content with less power than the other has. Evidently, he is a secondary character used as some sort of background for the first. The main character stands out the more clearly as leader in presence of a second less powerful. This second character, too, is narrator. He is more. Kipling has aimed to show how in India, that land of contrasts, one may indeed be "Brother to a prince and fellow to a beggar, if he be found worthy." The second character fulfils the first in the writer's purpose for the story. The picture of the king is not complete without the picture of the beggar, also, as an interpretative complement. There is a famous painting by Paris Bordone in which amid the regal splendor of the Ducal Palace, a fisherman, half-clad and trembling, is presenting to the Doge,

St. Mark's ring, the pledge of promised reward. Such is the main picture, but in the lower right-hand corner at the foot of the steps that lead upward to the Ducal throne there sits the barefoot, fisherman's lad, a boy of the people, gazing with "wide-eyed curiosity" at the glitter and pomp before him. The lad fulfils the picture. It is true that he is needed in the painting for a technical purpose, — simply to fill in a portion of the canvas where a side-view of the steps would otherwise leave, in the foreground, a broad space unoccupied. Yet the lad has a further purpose; he acts as an interpretative complement. Just so is the lesser character needed in *The Man Who Would Be King*, — as a narrator, but also as a complement.

An indefinite continuance of the process of plot examination would confirm, not change this view of essentials of plot. In it one finds the main characters with more or less hint as to their general nature and motives, the circumstances leading to the complication, this complication, and climax. Sometimes the climax and *dénouement* are separate; sometimes they coincide. Sometimes the circumstances leading to the complication are to be found in the nature of the character. Usually, the plot statement contains, beside the main character, one or two accessory characters. To study plot a little more thoroughly, however, let us analyze in more detail another story-plan, — that of *The Outcasts of Poker Flat:* Four disreputable characters, exiled from town, start to cross a mountain range; but, halting for rest, are

overtaken by a snow-storm and perish. The theme, as has been stated, is the acceptance of chance as a controlling motive; the purpose is to show the essential soundness of heart that can coexist with outward conventional badness. Bearing this in mind, let us try to follow Bret Harte's steps in the construction of his plot. There is a clear reason for every movement. The climax is evidently the death of the outcasts. It could be nothing else, if climax represents the final outworking of the theme; for risk of life is the greatest chance that can be taken, and death is the extreme to which acceptance of chance might lead one. One asks, however, whether it would not have been just as satisfactory if death had been merely faced, not met. Is there a reason that death should at length conquer? Merely facing an event, however fearful, is not actually experiencing it. There must be a complete yielding to make the acceptance sure and perfect. So much for the climax and the theme. The climax is, however, also in perfect harmony with the purpose. If anything will avail to bring out the spark of good in character, the imminence of death will do it.

Four characters are mentioned in the plot statement. It seems as if one main character ought to suffice. Yet here, no one main character is definitely marked out. All four were evidently regarded by Bret Harte as essential to the plot. A person who would accept chance as a controlling motive would have to be of a cool, calculating nature. Although it is not at all impossible that a woman should have

such a disposition, yet it is improbable. A man would be much more appropriate to this story. Picture a man of a cool, calculating disposition. Almost instinctively you bring him into comparison with his opposite — some one who lacks his qualities, who does not measure carefully every act to see just how it may result. Bret Harte made this uncalculating person a woman. Man and woman, representing the calculating and the uncalculating types, are here contrasted. To make the central character stand forth unique, however, he must be shown beside his own kind. He must show himself somehow superior to those with whom he associates, not simply in his skill and foresight, but in his essential nature; hence another man is introduced, one who is also of a calculating nature. Three characters are thus accounted for, one central, two as accessories for contrast. The picturing of the central character would demand no more. Yet the theme demands still another. In order that the acceptance of chance as a controlling motive may be fully displayed, not only must the calculating and uncalculating be shown, but in the acceptance of chance, man must be contrasted with woman, man must be contrasted with man, and woman must be contrasted with woman. Two men and two women, therefore, appear in the simple plot statement.

These characters are all taken from one class — outcasts. The plot calls them disreputable characters exiled from town. It is necessary that they should be such, for the purpose of the story is to

show the latent good hidden deep in evil. The characters must be bad; that is taken for granted. The lower down in the social scale, therefore, these characters are placed, the more surprising and hopeful is the discovery of any lingering spark of good. Since outcasts are at the extreme foot of the social scale, they, of all people, are most fittingly used in a story of this kind.

As the complication, preparatory to the climax, Bret Harte used a sudden heavy snowfall in the mountains. Yet to imprison his characters, thus, seems a slow and unsatisfactory way to kill them. An avalanche sweeping everything in its path, a sudden slip over a precipice, would certainly have done the work just as thoroughly. In such case, however, the outcasts would not have accepted chance at all; they would have been merely overtaken by chance. To accept it, they must realize its full measure; they must see plainly what is ahead of them; they must have time to consider. Death must, then, come upon them gradually. Time, too, must be allowed for character development. Something may in the interval arise to call out the best that is in these outcasts. There might be several ways of showing them squarely facing death. They might be awaiting execution within a limited number of days. Such a situation, however, would contradict the original proposition: these characters are outcasts. Society has indeed turned against them, but it has contented itself merely by turning its back, not by disposing of them utterly. Again,

were they awaiting execution, they would be dealing with men and law, not with chance. There could then be no indefiniteness. Isolation, involving cold and starvation, would seem satisfactorily to meet every requirement. It will not cause immediate death, but it may give ample time for character development under favoring conditions. A mountain was easily chosen as a suitable place for such an event to happen. There is further appropriateness, also, in severing these men and women from contact with society even at the time of their final struggle. They are outcasts in life, they should be outcasts in death. If they leave one town, they must die before they reach the next; for they are really not outcasts at all, if after they have been driven from one town, they are received by the people of another. So long as they are on their way, they continue under the social ban.

The circumstances from which the complication springs consist of a simple halting for rest on the journey. This action seems almost incidental; no one suspects that it will have dire results. Circumstances again can be referred to character. Ordinarily, people would not halt at all, midway across a mountain range; and if, perchance, they should halt, it would be for a short time, not for a full night.

Thus, one sees how carefully a plot is constructed. There is evident an orderly and logical sequence from character and plot circumstances to climax. Each part has been accounted for by what immediately precedes. Yet one notes how the writer's theme

and purpose have acted as guide-posts throughout the way. Not only did they decide the climax, but with the climax they decided every other step. Naturally one cannot say that every story that is a work of art is constructed in some such toilsome way as this. Some plots form themselves hurriedly and exactly without much interference from the writer. Yet, until one has learned to think out stories logically, without toying with the little irrelevancies, the fancied elegancies; until one has thoroughly grasped the spirit of Short-story form and movement; one should test every story by some such plan as this.

IV

STRUCTURE

Plot marks out the rough lines upon which a story is to be built, while structure completes the specifications for the building. Upon the workmanship of the one no less than of the other depend the beauty and the strength of a story. A single error in plotting may make the whole unstable and tottering; a single flaw in structure may ruin the symmetry and mar the grace of a story. There is an art in sketching outlines and another in arranging the minutiæ. Structure concerns itself with the latter. It involves the work of details, of weather-boarding, of chimneys, of window-frames and doors.[1] It is used, as a technical term, to denote not the finishing, the final careful polishing of a story, but rather the minute elaboration of the plot preparatory to the actual work of writing. It is the altogether necessary, if slightly irksome, process of perfecting a design before one can begin to make it appear in haunting word and living phrase. Every detail

[1] "[Stevenson] mapped out the plan of a coming novel whenever he resolved starting on one. This was putting up the scaffolding, he said; and as soon as the foundation was laid and the walls begun, he called attention to the rising structure." E. Blantyre Simpson, *The Robert Louis Stevenson Originals*, p. 153.

must have a reason for its existence and for its position. Each sentence, each incident, each character, each description, each remark, must be chosen for its harmony with the single effect and fitted into the place where it will count for greatest strength.[1] Parts must be so joined that the sutures do not stand out boldly. The skilful story will seem complete only when every part is so necessary that, were it removed, there would be an evident lack. In the structure of the Short-story there belongs the consideration of effective subsidiary incidents and characters, of proportion, of order of events, of verisimilitude, of point of view, or as Mr. Pitkin more aptly calls it, of the "angle of narration." Beginning and end, although they might appropriately be considered under structure, will on account of their importance be treated in a separate chapter.

In his admirable book, *The Materials and Methods of Fiction*, Mr. Clayton Hamilton says: "The aim of a Short-story is to produce a single narrative effect with the greatest economy of means that is consistent with the utmost emphasis." [2] This statement should be kept before one constantly as a guide in the study of structure. It means that everything which goes

[1] Stevenson bears witness to the value of such careful workmanship. "'Belle,' he said, 'I see it all so clearly! The story unfolds itself before me to the least detail — there is nothing left in doubt. I never felt so before in anything I ever wrote. It [*Weir of Hermiston*] will be my best work; I feel myself so sure in every word!'" *The Robert Louis Stevenson Originals*, p. 182.

[2] P. 173.

into a Short-story must be rigidly examined to see whether it is necessary, whether it adds anything to the whole, whether it fits perfectly into the place that has been made ready. Perhaps some other incident would be more harmonious; would make the story more complete. We quote Mr. Hamilton again at length: "The phrase 'with the greatest economy of means' implies that the writer of a Short-story should tell his tale with the fewest necessary number of characters and incidents, and should project it in the narrowest possible range of place and time. If he can get along with two characters, he should not use three. If a single event will suffice for his effect, he should confine himself to that. If his story can pass in one place at one time, he must not disperse it over several times and places. But in striving always for the greatest possible conciseness, he must not neglect the equally important need of producing his effect 'with the utmost emphasis.' If he can gain markedly in emphasis by violating the strictest possible economy, he should do so; for, as Poe stated, undue brevity is exceptionable, as well as undue length. . . . The greatest structural problem of the writer of Short-stories is to strike just the proper balance between the effort for economy of means — which tends to conciseness — and the effort for the utmost emphasis — which tends to amplitude of treatment." [1]

In every story, there are likely to be some characters which are not necessary to the plot movement,

[1] *The Materials and Methods of Fiction*, pp. 175–6.

but are necessary to structure. These, one calls developing characters, for they assist in the growth of plot into the complete story. Often they appear for contrast as emphasizing foils. If the main characters are unusual in some way, the developing characters may be commonplace, ordinary, so that what is unusual may be made to stand out the more distinctly. If the main characters are disreputable, their wickedness will be accentuated by contrast with the good. Piney and The Innocent are thus introduced in *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*. They exist for "utmost emphasis." Bret Harte's story is the stronger for their presence. Thus it is through all the range of possible contrasts. The one character may serve as a background for the other, sometimes emphasizing, sometimes merely measuring the other. Thus does one view the highest lights and the deepest shadows. Yet characters rarely exist for contrast alone. The rule of greatest economy of means requires also that they be woven into the structure in other ways. As well as serving for "utmost emphasis" Piney and her lover are the means of supplying provisions to the outcasts. In Henry James' *The Madonna of the Future*, over against the man with the noble but never attained ideal is set the artist with no soul, whose only look is downward, whose only work is to make caricatures of life. At the end, the artist with the unattained ideals is still the great man. The other is himself hardly more than a caricature. The incident in which he flaunts his wares is more than a character contrast; it is

mood giving. It utters a note of hopelessness, of despair. Already one feels that the artist with an ideal has failed utterly and completely. His, indeed, has been the luxury of cherishing alone an ideal without the pain of striving to attain it. It is a pessimistic story, as all stories of lost opportunities must be, and the man of the caricatures enforces its impression of utter barrenness. The more purposes a single character can be made to serve and serve naturally, the fewer the characters that will be necessary, and the stronger the story. Contrasting characters can frequently be thus used.

Sometimes, developing characters are scarcely individuals at all; they supply background and give atmosphere. As such, they are not carefully drawn: some may be merely mentioned; others may be distinguished slightly. Extra characters are used sometimes merely to carry out details. A narrator who is not a participant in the action is sometimes needed. It is useless and impossible to enumerate all the ways in which accessory characters may serve. Each story has its own needs. A character may be added for the sake of naturalness. When there is something apparently mysterious in the story, a person may be used to confirm the strangeness, to make it actual. In *They*, again, Madden, the butler, serves exactly such a purpose. Up to the point where he enters there has been no reason to suspect that the children are not real children. They have seemed excessively shy, they have never been named, but neither has the blind woman nor

the man from the other side of the county. Now, by questions, the butler shows surprise that the man from the other side of the county should have seen the children. Had he seen them even before the blind woman had spoken to him? Evidently they are visible to some and invisible to others. The atmosphere of mystery is deepened by being made more definite.

In *The Revolt of Mother*, there appear several minor characters. Chief among these are the daughter who sits embroidering and the young son who lopes off to school. Both of these characters are necessary to the proper development of the story. Because she wishes her daughter to have a parlor, not a kitchen in which to be married, and because Nancy and George Eastman are to stay at the Penns' after the marriage, Sarah Penn feels especially anxious for the fulfilment of the promise of a new house. Without such justification, her revolt would have been inexcusable; it would have revealed a self-willed, obstinate, and disloyal wife. That she has really been an ever-faithful wife is emphasized, however, throughout the story in many little ways. How eager she is — even after forty years — to bake Adoniram's favorite pies! The boy is of less real service. He is needed chiefly to assist in the moving. There would have been much impropriety in calling in the neighbors to assist. They would have been under no obligations to obey the wife, and they would never have run the risk of angering the husband. This is strictly a family affair. The boy must obey

his mother. To him, also, explanations which could never be made to neighbors, could be given. The minister is another minor personage. He comes to talk the matter over. Evidently he wishes to convince the wife that she has been undutiful. He goes away dismayed. In the story he serves merely to show that the wife is resolute, that her purpose has not changed. She feels that she has nothing to be ashamed of. She is unabashed. But for the minister, we should have wondered just a little whether the wife would be steadfast in her purpose and hold her ground on the arrival of her husband. The other personages are scarcely more than mentioned: the hired man, the haymakers, the men and women of the community. They represent nothing in the story, except a background of farm toil and neighborhood gossip. A story is constructed rationally, and the developing characters are simply the outgrowth of its needs.

Characters, however, always appear in relation to incident. It is, therefore, to this element of structure that attention must now be turned. It is a rule of the Short-story that every part must in some way further the progress toward a predetermined end. Incidents must supply movement and life; they must add the details which make a story rounded and complete. Upon their skilful choice and arrangement, much of the effectiveness of a story depends. Incidents serve in three ways: to illustrate, to forward movement, and to give emotional stimulus. No story is likely to limit their use to a

single way. Action and emotion must appear together in every story; hence incidents of movement and incidents of emotion will be found side by side or in combination.

Illustrative incidents are more rarely found; they are not fundamentally necessary. Incidents of movement are, of course, of the very life of a story. Such are the plot incidents; such the subsidiary incidents that further the progress of action. By arranging emotional incidents so that they come between important incidents of movement, one may produce the effect of minor crises and keep the story from suffering from a dull monotony of relentless progression. It might be supposed that crises would quicken interest, then cause it to lag; that they would not only break monotony but also slacken suspense; that, consequently, a story would consist of a succession of jolts and would have no final singleness of impression. To one climbing a hill, the full glory of vision is revealed only at the end of the ascent. Yet all along the way there are partial revelations, which indicate one's progress and grow in beauty as one rises. So it is in the Short-story; each new crisis enlarges the view, but the climax fulfils them all at the last. There is ever an upward gradation, and the crises but mark the lookout points along the way, each point higher than the one preceding. Between crises there need be no weakening of interest and suspense, for one need not descend into the valley before reaching each higher position. Thus, in

The Outcasts of Poker Flat, the first crisis is the declaration of the Duchess that she will go no farther, and the consequent halting. The next crisis is The Innocent's offer of his mule-load of provisions. The third is the discovery of snow; the fourth, Uncle Billy's theft of the mules; the fifth, Mr. Oakhurst's departure from camp. Here is a crescendo of interest. All the way there has been a gradual winding up of suspense toward the climax which is yet to come. *Mrs. Knollys* shows excellently the same structure. The first crisis is Charles Knollys' fall into the crevasse: the second, the German scientist's announcement that the body cannot be recovered: the third is the letter telling of the possibility of finding the body after forty-five years. The climax is, of course, the actual recovery of the body after the long years of waiting. Between crises there is not the lagging of interest that one might expect in this sort of story. Each time, one waits to hear how Mrs. Knollys is going to bear the new announcement. Thus, there is also a natural emotional progression between crises, and the story moves directly toward the end without check or jar.

The second type — the illustrative incident — likewise appeals to the intellect. Illustrations, in expository writing, illuminate. So do illustrative incidents in narrative. Sometimes they give merely a clearer insight into some fact of the story; they make it vivid by making it concrete. Frequently, a character is thus explained. When in *Markheim*,

"the notes of a piano were wakened to the music of a hymn," the murderer drifts into a revery that shows how great has been his fall from an innocent childhood. Of course, this incident has also a certain emotional value, yet it is chiefly illustrative. The incident already referred to in *The Revolt of Mother*, — that of Sarah Penn's making mince pies —, is illustrative. Still another in the same story is Adoniram's complaint that his wife should have kept the boy at home to help unload wood. Sometimes an illustrative incident may serve to shed new light on a theme. It may approach the theme from a new direction, and become a means of "utmost emphasis" by presenting an additional circumstance. In *They*, the illness and death of Jenny's child is but to show the love of a mother. Such incidents are easily combined with those of movement or of illustration.

Emotional incidents do not further the action of a story directly. They give tone and atmosphere and stimulate the reader's sympathy. They may be mood-giving and in absolute harmony with the tone; they may lighten a story by a sudden spark of humor. Whether they are used, however, to intensify or to relieve, they may assist in creating a single impression. Although emotional incidents may stand alone, as in *The Madonna of the Future* already referred to, they are usually combined with those of movement or of illustration. The incident in *Markheim* of the striking of the clocks is a subtle blending of two kinds. Obviously, the

emotional suspense is vastly heightened, yet one cannot deny that Markheim's conscience is thus prepared for what follows. The incident combines emotion and movement. The oftener such combinations can be made, the stronger the story: for condensation increases rapidity and rapidity always tends toward directness.

Just as one studies the kinds of incidents and seeks to vary them one with another, so one must be ever watchful that character and action and atmosphere appear in due proportion. Each element must receive a proper, but not an overemphasis. In the relation of an incident or the description of a character a great many minor and seemingly needless details may be given. They exist for emphasis. In *The Revolt of Mother*, a host of details are given about Sarah Penn. First, one is given a picture of her; then one sees her in her household duties; is told how she washes dishes, sweeps, bakes pies. Next, one sees her in relation to her husband — first giving him a "plain talk," then making his shirts, then preparing him for his trip. Many of these details seem almost unnecessary, but one must remember that this is a character story. At the climax, action is given its full chance. One witnesses the actual moving, the packing of the dishes, the carting of the household goods to the new barn, the transforming of the harness-room into the kitchen. Yet in everything, one is made to feel the force of character. In *The Man Who Would Be King*, little space is given to

direct character portrayal. Here action — adventure — is really the main point. In so far as is necessary, character is portrayed through this medium. In *Mrs. Knollys*, character and atmosphere are chiefly emphasized; in *The Masque of the Red Death*, atmosphere. Occasionally, a striking character or a striking action may be best emphasized by few words. Briefness where one is expecting detail, may startle one into attention. Ordinarily, however, one should plan to give most space to that which demands most emphasis.

One frequently finds another means of emphasis. A common device in music is to repeat a theme by variations, or to repeat some phrase over and over again. With every recurrence one is pleased, as at recognizing something familiar. The same device has been used with good effect in the Short-story. Poe recognized its value both for poetry and for prose. In the Short-story it may be variously used: sometimes the theme may be thus emphasized; sometimes a refrain is suggestive of the climax, of the purpose, — sometimes only of tone. It may take several forms: it may be a set phrase or a genuine refrain; it may recur in variations of a single idea. Yet whatever the form, the device is sure to deepen the impression. These variations may stand out boldly, or they may be so deftly wrought into the context as to be scarcely noticeable. Yet the same subtle effect is always produced, and, though the device is simple, it is powerful for unity. Two or three kinds may appear in the same

story without detracting from the effect of any one of them, or without becoming wearisome.

In *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, the theme is suggested several times. It is said of Mr. Oakhurst that he was "too much of a gambler not to accept Fate. With him life was at best an uncertain game." Again, he points out "the folly of 'throwing up their hand before the game was played out.'" He tells The Innocent that "Luck is a mighty queer thing. . . . And it's finding out when it's going to change that makes you. If you can hold your cards right along, you're all right." Later, he "settles himself coolly to the losing game before him." Finally, in the inscription, he speaks of himself as having "struck a streak of bad luck." These variations keep the theme ever before one's mind, without causing any strain in attention. In the same story, there is a refrain suggestive both of purpose and of climax.

In *Mrs. Knollys*, the variations of the theme are less easily distinguishable. Mrs. Knollys is introduced as hopeful-eyed, and Charles Knollys is said to have had "great hopes." Hope is shown again where the two, instead of looking at the mountain round them, are planning the furnishings for the cottage on Box Hill. The German scientist had a hope of refuting Splüthner's theory. Then Mrs. Knollys in her distress exclaims, "They said that they hoped he could be recovered," and out on his evening stroll the scientist echoes the remark. She lived with his memory. "Was he not coming back to

her?" "She knew the depths of human hope and sorrow." Mary Knollys had looked five and forty years ahead. On her last night of waiting, she had slept, "the glacier ever present in her dreams." Twice it is said of the glacier that "immortality lay brooding in its hollows." Here are many different kinds of hope, to be sure, but they all echo the same spirit of quiet waiting, of a mind bent upon the future.

In *The Masque of the Red Death*, the tall ebony clock intensifies mightily the awfulness of the scene. A refrain or a phrase repeated with variations may thus assist tone; it may even represent the steady, irresistible oncoming of destiny; if skilfully used, it might hasten movement itself and make action more tense. From a different field, in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, one has a good instance. Action is definitely hastened by the repeated refrain:

> "Into the valley of death
> Rode the six hundred."

To a passenger on an express train, the sight of telegraph poles streaming backwards along the way seems to accelerate the movement. As a matter of fact, the poles do not make progress; they only mark it. A refrain in a story of intense action may have like value.

In directing attention continuously toward that which deserves greatest emphasis, the orderly arrangement of events within a story needs to be considered. It is a frequent stumbling-block. Some say that the chronological order is likely to

make a story move slowly; that it may necessitate beginning too far back and admitting much irrelevant detail; that a story can rarely be told in the order in which it happened. Others assert that the chronological is the natural order, and that it is a means of avoiding otherwise necessary interruptions in the narrative. There is a measure of truth in both assertions. Much depends on the story, much on the skill of the writer. It is taken for granted that a writer who knows his business will not load a story with pointless detail. There is, of course, a certain amount of antecedent action which must be explained in almost every story. Yet one need not tell all this antecedent action as it is supposed to have happened, nor does one need to mass it all at the beginning. It may be distributed throughout the story, yet not interfere at all with chronological order. Of course, it would be awkward to lead one up to a point and then to turn deliberately to say, "It must be explained that just four months before, while Jack was in the hayfield. . . ." Such action may be explained within the story in a conversational passage, in a revery, by an incidental reference, by intimation, or by narrative amplification.

If there is much antecedent action to be told, the task will naturally be somewhat more difficult. In *The Revolt of Mother*, Mrs. Freeman had to show the inconveniences that Sarah Penn had long endured at the hands of her husband. She might have marshaled these all at the beginning and then have

reviewed them. She chose a more artistic way. She began the story with the immediate provocation and let that lead to a review of the past in the accusation of the husband. Where the past concerns the main character alone, and records his own failures and successes, revery may take the place of conversation, as in *Markheim.* In these cases the antecedent action is made not to interrupt, but to forward the movement chronologically. In *Marjorie Daw,* the letters mention incidentally the trip that Edward Delaney and John Flemming had expected to take, and tell of Flemming's accident and its cause. The curio dealer intimates certain things about Markheim's past life. The first sentence of *The Cask of Amontillado* is but an intimation of preceding action. It does not enter into details. Several times in *The Outcasts of Poker Flat,* there is a direct reference to something that happened before the opening of the story. Yet these references are in the nature of narrative amplifications which may refer either backward or forward without disturbing the movement in any way. In *The Man Who Would Be King,* a strict chronological order is followed, and the antecedent action is related as it happened before the story proper begins. It could not have been arranged differently, since the antecedent action here but introduces the man who is to be the narrator of his own experiences.

Thus, in several ways, antecedent action may be handled. There is another difficulty, — that of

arranging events which happen at the same time. In *Mrs. Knollys*, there is a good example of a direct violation of chronological order. The last sentence of the second division speaks of Mrs. Knollys' return to England. The first sentence of division three shows the German scientist just after he had found out his distressing blunder. Three paragraphs later, Mrs. Knollys is said to be living in the little cottage in Surrey. The break here seems unavoidable, unless these three paragraphs had been omitted. In such case, however, one would have felt only reproach for the coldness of the scientist. There would have been a note of harshness in a story otherwise sweet. The story is better as it is, in spite of the interruption. Although there are many times when the nature of the story will make such violation advisable, the chronological order may be followed in most cases satisfactorily.

Sometimes a Short-story is divided, as it were, into chapters. The divisions are marked by a row of asterisks, by Roman numerals, or simply by breaks in the pages. Although they appear in many good stories — in those of Henry James almost without exception — they are usually to be avoided. Where there seems to be a complete change in scene and a full break in the line of thought, they are excusable. The break would be all the more evident were one to reach it without a warning signal. In *Mrs. Knollys*, the divisions represent complete stages in the life of the main character; hence the breaks do not seem to jar

or to interfere with the story's totality. If the divisions represent only passage of time, they retard the movement and are in most cases worse than useless. Time intervals can generally be bridged over by a phrase or a sentence; sometimes they may be simply ignored. If a story can be built without chapters, it is a sore mistake to divide it. Even the stories in which a visible break is necessary seem thereby to lose force. They tempt the reader to take a rest; for if the story is in no hurry, why should he be? The divided story is, at least, liable to fail of producing a single impression.

If is often somewhat of a problem, too, to know in what form to cast one's story; to find out what Mr. Pitkin calls the "angle of narration." Here, as elsewhere, one's best guide is common-sense aided by an instinct for propriety. A story may be told objectively as if by "an external omniscient personality." This means has long been popular. It has, of course, its disadvantages; it may at times lead to a lack of naturalness and vividness. Yet it allows one to see what is happening in all places and at all times; it permits one to know the inner thoughts and the hidden impulses; to analyze a situation or a character. From no other angle could *Markheim* have been told so effectively. The objective angle makes it easy to treat every one impersonally, and it allows one to concentrate all attention on the story and utterly to ignore the presence of a narrator. O. Henry's *After Twenty Years* might have been told by a witness, but it

would thus have lost in directness and have gained nothing for the extra trouble. Sometimes the objective is the only possible angle of narration. *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* could never have been related with propriety in any other way. Four of the participants died within the story. Of the two who survived, Uncle Billy made his escape before complications became serious. The Innocent, through the loss of Piney, was too deeply concerned to have acted as narrator. He might, perhaps, have related the story to a friend who in turn would have acted as narrator. Even this method would have been unsatisfactory. Piney would have been the main character; the outcasts, but friends and sharers of misfortune. He could never have told just what the Duchess and Piney did after the departure of Mr. Oakhurst. The story would have been incomplete. This objective angle of narration, moreover, has the virtues of completeness and of simplicity.

A story may be told from the angle of participant or of a witness. This angle makes for vividness and plausibility. One is always more eager to hear and more ready to believe the narration of what an acquaintance has seen or done than one is to hear and believe an impersonal, objective narration. A narrator of a story becomes temporarily an acquaintance, and the story takes on the proportions of the actual. Especially vivid is an adventure story told from the angle of the main character. Of course, this angle precludes, as has been sug-

gested, the possibility of catastrophe. Yet one can still allow the narrator to be shipwrecked, to drift about on a piece of wreckage for a week, and finally to be picked up by a tramp steamer. The possibility of catastrophe makes the story more thrilling, but the certainty of hairbreadth escapes makes it more satisfying.

Although the angle of main participant may be good in stories of action, it is ill adapted to the character story. The main character cannot discourse on his own merits and peculiarities; he must become known entirely through his actions and manner of speech. For this reason, an accessory or minor character is often used as narrator. Thus a story may combine the possibility of characterization with the vividness of actual participation. *They* is fittingly told from this angle. The blind woman could not have told the story with propriety. We should never have known her, never have heard her cry, "Children, children," or listened to her singing,

"In the pleasant orchard-closes."

Nor could the story have been told objectively. The atmosphere is too refined, too unreal. We could never believe, even for the purposes of fiction, in such a blind woman, in such spirit children, unless, through the eyes of one who had seen and known, we, too, might see. This story — as are most others of its kind — is narrated in the first person. The "I," though making for vividness, must be used with care. It may at times become obtrusive,

it may seem egotistic, and draw to itself more than its due of attention. At times, too, it may go outside its limit and seem to look at the story objectively. There are several ways of telling every story, and one should search diligently for the best.

Sometimes, the participants are made to tell their story by a series of letters or by entries in a diary. This method is rarely used and is exceedingly difficult. A good letter is supposed to be newsy and full of detail of one kind and another. The letters of a story are allowed no such freedom. They must admit no detail which does not contribute to the story, yet they must still keep their easy naturalness. It is hard, too, by means of letters to maintain interest and movement. One feels that, at best, letters are but a record of events, and they seem to lack vivacity. If they are all written by the same person, they must each time suggest what has been written back in answer. The diary method is subject to the same difficulties. It is likely to seem yet more flat than letters, for it must be written by one person, and it is addressed to no one in particular. *Marjorie Daw* is an example of the successful story told by letters. It is subject to frequent adverse criticism because it does not continue the letter form throughout. The climax is written from the objective angle. Thus the story lacks singleness of form. However much it is to be desired, singleness of form is not absolutely required of the Short-story. The change of form

need not destroy unity of impression. Indeed, in this story the change is required. The point of the story is that John Flemming should be so influenced by letters that he would go in person to The Pines. His going must be actual, if the story is to reach a climax. Between letters there is expected to be a time interval in which things have been happening. The break which comes from change of form — in a story told mainly by letters — is, therefore, not particularly noticeable. Of course, when possible, singleness of form as well as singleness of impression is to be desired.

When the narrator is himself a witness or an auditor, the story usually, though not always,[1] is a story within a story. There is a narrative introduction of one or more paragraphs after which some one, generally reluctantly, tells a tale which he, in turn, may have witnessed, or may have experienced as main or minor participant. This introduction may be told objectively or by an impersonal "I." An example or two may make the method more clear. *The Man Who Would Be King* begins with the impersonal "I" as narrator. In the introduction, he tells of his meeting Peachey Taliaferro Carnehan, who is to be the narrator of the real or inner story. Ordinarily, he would have relapsed then into the passive listener and Peachey would have taken up the story. It is not so in this case. Peachey Carnehan is to be an active participant only a little less important than the main

[1] *Mrs. Knollys* is an exception.

character, Dravot. Furthermore, he does not tell his story as a story, but as the recital of his adventures in Kafiristan with his friend. Moreover, he is half crazed. Under these conditions, he can characterize neither his friend nor himself. Yet one needs to know the two characters and to be interested in their adventure before the real story begins. The impersonal "I" introduces, therefore, not only Carnehan but Dravot, and tells something of his own experience with them. The structure is thus somewhat complicated.

The Madonna of the Future illustrates a slightly different and more usual type. The introduction is again told by the impersonal "I." This time there is presented the conventional group of talkers, one of whom makes a remark which leads the others to demand of him the suggested story. He then begins, and, since he is a minor participant, hardly more than a witness, is free to describe fully the main character and comment upon him at will. There are, of course, still other methods of varying this device, which has been in use since the times of Boccaccio and Chaucer. Of course, the device adds vividness and plausibility, but it fails in several respects. It is hard to find an introduction fresh and original. At times there may be ambiguity as to just who is talking; too many details may be introduced at the beginning. The device may detract attention from the story to the manner of its telling, and it may — it frequently does — rise to a dramatic height in the telling which seems

unnatural for an oral narrator. The story may thus fail to convince of its reality.[1]

It seems hardly necessary to say that a story must above all else impress a reader with its genuineness. All the minutiæ of structure should be arranged with an eye to verisimilitude. To be convincing, a story must seem so real that one can believe that it happened or seem to see it happening before one's eyes. If one feels that one's credulity is being imposed upon, one turns away in disgust. Even a fairy story must for the time seem real, if it is to prove interesting; it must have qualities which will make the imagination move with it in utter subjection. Rarely do grown people enjoy fairy stories as do children, for the obvious reason

[1] It is worth while to note the relative frequency of use of these "angles of narration" by several of the great Short-story writers. In 136 stories of Maupassant, the objective angle is found in 61; that of participant, in 21; of witness or auditor, in 4; of the story within a story, in 17 + 33. For 72 stories of Kipling the record is: objective angle, 40; participant, 9; witness or auditor, 13; story within a story, 0 + 10. For 135 stories of O. Henry, it is: objective, 100; participant, 13; witness or auditor, 10; story within a story, 0 + 12. For 33 of Poe, it is 3, objective; 23, participant; 5, witness or auditor; 0 + 2, story within a story. Out of 10 stories of Stevenson, 7 have the objective angle; 2, that of participant; 0, that of witness or auditor; 0 + 1, that of the story within a story. For 26 stories of Henry James the record is; 14, objective; 5, participant; 3, witness or auditor; 0 + 4, story within a story. When two numbers are given for a story within a story, the first signifies those whose introductions are objective; the second, those which have an introduction by an auditor or witness. Not all the stories examined conform to the strictly modern Short-story form.

that the imaginations of mature persons have been blunted by contact with an actual world. They no longer have the power to move in and out through fanciful realms, to slay dragons, and to find dwarfs beneath the roots of mammoth trees. For them, real dragons of an actual world must be slain by real people. Men and women pride themselves on their ability to discern between the true and the false. They will not suffer themselves to be chased by imaginary robbers nor will they kneel to await the stroke of fantastic battle-axemen. So long as they feel that a story is all make-believe, nothing can persuade them to read it in more than a half-hearted way, if, indeed, they read it at all. "In other words a realist that is an artist as well, selects not only what is true, but also what will immediately without argument seem true." [1]

No one supposes nowadays, that a story to seem genuine must be "an exact transcript of life." The skilful artist masks the actual by the real; he tears down only that he may build something more ideally beautiful and true. A character trait may be made to stand out in exaggerated significance, an incident may be shorn of half its detail, a motive may be entirely suppressed, yet the story may be lifelike, and true in its underlying idea. The most wildly imaginative tale, however, may have truth of idea and still fail to be convincing. It may need something to link it with actual experience, some contact with what one knows personally. In *They*, the

[1] Fansler, *Types of Prose Narratives*, p. 429.

reader is made to approach very near the unreal and purely fanciful, yet Kipling has made certain that the story shall be convincing. Spirit children and an automobile speeding across the downs seem incongruous. At first the idea seems to jar one's sense of propriety. Yet the careful description of the race across the downs and the later repairing of the machine certainly place the story in present times and link it to the vulgar earth. The automobile is, however, not a part of the external description, a mere something thrown in to make the story more plausible; it is a part of the story itself. But for it, there would have been no story; for it is the machine, rare in those parts, that first stirs the woman's interest. By frequent contact with actuality the whole story becomes convincing. Poe's stories are convincing by their vividness. They are not real, not actual, they seem a collection of bad dreams; yet, while reading them, one falls completely under their spell. Kipling made the story of *The Man Who Would Be King* — wild and fantastic as it is — seem real partly by making one feel the burning, suffocating heat of a summer night in India. We have not all known India, but we have all known heat of some sort, and, in our imaginations, are able to intensify it. By any of these ways, or by all of them, a story may be made convincing.

Of course, to make a story seem true, one need not limit oneself to incidents and extended descriptions. Details scattered here and there throughout the story are equally effective. If a girl faints at sight

of a cow, by all means one should call it a red cow or a black. If the setting is a New York restaurant, it should be verified by a few rapid strokes. Details of place and time always make a story definite. Characters, too, may be allowed to make confirmatory remarks, so that the story may seem to be vouched for. Stevenson at times used footnotes for this purpose. Slight references now and then to actual facts and occurrences help. Of more value, however, than any mere device, is the exact fitting of part with part. All structure may be made to count toward a story's verisimilitude.

V

THE END AND THE BEGINNING

First impressions and last impressions are generally the most definite; first, because the mind is free and ready to receive them; last, because nothing may follow to modify or to change them. It is natural, therefore, that the beginning and the end of any discourse are important structurally, and that of the two, end deserves the more careful handling. In the Short-story, end is far more important than is beginning; it marks the point of deepest impression. From the start, the end is kept in view. To it, one looks with greatest expectation. For it, all the momentum of the story gathers. It is not a summation as is the end of a debate; it is rather the final enforcement of the single effect. If the end is sharp, it will intensify the single impression; if it is weak, it may dissipate it and leave the reader disappointed. A story should never promise more than it can fulfil. Unless the end is satisfactory, the whole story fails. A piece of pottery may be artistically modeled, but if it breaks in the last burning, it is worse than useless, for it represents waste. Unless a story fulfils one's expectations, it is but a waste of time and energy. It is the function of the end not only to bring a story to a fitting close,

but to fill it out to completeness by presenting the single impression in its final intensity.

There is, of course, no one best way of ending a story. One must be guided by the nature of the story and of the single impression to be presented. One story may stop abruptly at the moment of climax; others must continue for a few sentences or for a few paragraphs. All, however, should end the moment the story is complete. All extra words at the last detract from the impression. A more simple, less prolonged end would have been possible in *The Madonna of the Future.* One feels satisfied after Mr. Theobald's death to know that he lay buried in his beloved Florence, and one rather resents in the story the further intrusion of the minor characters. There is a close harmony here between structure and the nature of the story. Long musing and idle dreaming would not have been well adapted to a hurried treatment. Some of the long and partially irrelevant portions can be excused on that account, — but not the end. Henry James was developing a situation. Yet with the passing of the dreamer passed also the dream, and there the story should have ended. Too long an end, however relevant, may lose by failing to be sharp. Too short an end may be, however, just as dangerous, if it fail to complete the story and leave the reader not fully satisfied.

An end may be, however, at once abrupt and complete. Climax and conclusion may be simultaneous. Nothing is left to be explained; the story is

its own sufficient comment. The end is the natural and unmistakable outcome of the plot, yet it may be unsuspected until the last sentence or even until the last word. Progress towards climax may be furthered by devices so subtly concealed that they become evident only after the story is reviewed. Such construction attains the ideal of Short-story form in rapidity and directness. Notice the end of Stevenson's *Markheim:*

"He confronted the maid upon the threshold with something like a smile.

"'You had better go for the police,' said he: 'I have killed your master.'"

At the end of the first of these sentences, the reader is still in suspense. Is Markheim smiling, one wonders, at the thought of killing the maid, or at victory over his own evil nature? The last sentence relieves the suspense entirely by giving the answer. One cares to know no more. The story is complete. O. Henry is a master of this sort of ending. The end of nearly every one of his stories is a surprise. Until the final paragraph of *After Twenty Years,* one has had no suspicion that the policeman who first appears is Jimmy Wells. Yet when one reviews the story one recognizes indications of the outcome. When the policeman saw the stranger leaning against the door, he slowed his pace and walked up to him. He would have acted thus on his usual round. Yet in the light of the story's end one sees in this commonplace the action of a

man eager to recognize in the stranger his former friend. Later, he asks of Bob, "Going to call time on him sharp?" Jimmy Wells is making his plan. Still later, the plain-clothes man impersonating Jimmy speaks of his "position in one of the city departments." These remarks seem only natural, yet as one looks back, they are especially significant. Without them, the story would be incomplete and unsatisfactory, for the end would seem an accidental, rather than a necessary, logical, outcome. Many stories with ends such as these are likely to become wearisome. One fails to appreciate surprises, once they have become frequent, and one turns with relief to a more gradual end.

Often the nature of the story is such that climax and conclusion cannot be made to coincide. The climax itself introduces new questions. Until these are answered, the story is not complete. Suspense may be relieved while interest in the effect of climax is sustained. This end simply gathers up loose strands and satisfies final curiosity. In *The Revolt of Mother*, several paragraphs intervene between climax and end. These are necessary to the completeness of the story. One needs to know the effect of Mrs. Penn's act on the neighborhood and especially on Mr. Penn. The full force of the climax for the two main characters in *They* does not become evident at once. In *The Man Who Would Be King*, the end is long and somewhat complex. After the climax three things are yet necessary to the completion of the story: the narrator must present

the fulfilment of the latter half of the purpose expressed at the beginning, and bring his story to a close; the reader must be satisfied as to the fate of Carnehan. Usually, an end is less complex. The more simple the end, the more forceful, as a rule, will be the single impression. This sort of end, too, may conclude with a surprise, as in *Marjorie Daw*. In this case, also, it is interesting to notice how the conclusion has been prepared for during the story. In the fifth letter, Edward Delaney says that Marjorie Daw seems "like some lovely phantom that had sprung into existence out of the smoke-wreaths." In the eighth letter, he calls her "a shadow, a chimera," and he speaks of himself as "in the incongruous position of having to do with mere souls, with natures so finely tempered that I run some risk of shattering them in my awkwardness." In the ninth letter, again, "it all appears like an illusion, — the black masses of shadow under the trees, the fireflies whirling in Pyrrhic dances among the shrubbery, the sea over there, Marjorie sitting on the hammock." Of course it appears an illusion to Edward Delaney, but it all seems real to every one else until the last sentence.

There is frequently found yet another sort of end. It is neither climax nor the result of climax. It answers no questions. It is simply an intensifier of single effect, or a narrative comment. It is easy to overdo this sort of ending. It is easy to make irrelevant remarks or unduly to prolong the relevant. It is possible, however, to make this end a means of

deepening the simple impression and completing the story. A comment may but express the feeling already in a reader's heart, as in *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* where John Oakhurst is called "the strongest and yet the weakest of the outcasts of Poker Flat." *Mrs. Knollys* might have ended with the words, "She was living, he was dead; and she was two and forty years older than he." We should have been satisfied and have asked no further questions. Yet the longer end brings out more fully the pathetic sweetness of the story and realizes more completely the final triumph of hope. Notice the final paragraph of *The Masque of the Red Death:*

"And now was acknowledged the presence of the Red Death. He had come like a thief in the night. And one by one dropped the revellers in the blood-bedewed halls of their revel, and died each in the despairing posture of his fall. And the life of the ebony clock went out with that of the last of the gay. And the flames of the tripods expired. And Darkness and Decay and the Red Death held illimitable dominion over all."

This end is unnecessary to the understanding of the story, but it intensifies mightily the impression of horror that pervades the whole.

In a story of perfect workmanship there should be harmony between end and beginning. Often it is noticeable between even the first and the last sentences. This harmony unifies the final impression as perhaps no other structural device can. Yet the

device need not seem artificial, for it effects but a full close and manifests itself often so subtly as to be scarcely recognizable. It may appear as a correspondence of atmosphere, or in mood contrast, in identity of character, in the realization of some suggestion made at the beginning. In *After Twenty Years*, the first paragraph pictures the typical policeman; the last sentence shows the same conscientious guardian of the peace with the heart of a friend. The first sentence of *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* awakens expectations in regard to John Oakhurst; the last sentence stills them. In *Mrs. Knollys*, the closing sentence reverts to the glacier described at the beginning. The last sentence of *They* harmonizes with the vague, elusive atmosphere of an indeterminate dreamland suggested at the opening of the story:

"She left me to sit a little longer, only a little longer, by the screen, and I heard the sound of her feet die out along the gallery above."

End and beginning may be so skilfully wrought into harmony that they suggest much of the intervening story. Notice the first sentence of *The Cask of Amontillado*, and the last three:

"The thousand injuries of Fortunato I had borne as I best could; but when he ventured upon insult, I vowed revenge."

. . . . . .

"Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For the half of a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat.*"

One does not know the circumstances of revenge, yet one knows the means. The end is the fulfilment of the beginning. The last sentence is particularly expressive. The revenge was complete, for the avenger had never felt remorse. Thus end and beginning should be considered not as separate entities, but as varying expressions of the dominant note of the story, set in the places made akin by their importance for emphasis.

Beginning, in the Short-story, is as indefinite in length as is end. It may be a sentence, a paragraph, several paragraphs, or even pages. It may shade off into the story proper so delicately that one fails to recognize its limit. As soon as the reader is thoroughly interested, however, — in short, whenever he senses narrative complication, — a story may be said to be begun. One may thoroughly enjoy a narrative description or exposition without being aware that anything is going to happen. Yet one does not sense a story, until one sees a possibility of plot ahead. Some additional factor offering a chance of resistance must present itself. One need not be able to hazard a guess as to the main complication of the plot; one need merely feel that something interesting may result from the situation as indicated. One may read the records of two football teams and the lists of the weights and heights of their respective men, but not until one sees the two teams on one field, does one sense a game. Thus characters in a story may be described one after the other and no complication be indicated. If, however, they are

shown in a situation which will bring them into contact, one awakes to the possibility of interesting results. The introduction of new and different narrative factors always presupposes that something is going to happen. When plot thus begins to show itself, interest quickens, and the story is begun.

Although varying greatly in length and in content, beginnings are similar in their functions. A good beginning should set the emotional tone of a story, and should introduce its main characters. By setting the emotional tone at the beginning, much may be accomplished toward a definite unity of impression; since a false or jarring tone will at once be felt as discordant and may then be excluded. Emphasized at the beginning, it is fixed and helps to shape the reader's attitude toward all the incidents of the story. This tone may be fixed actively by a striking of the dominant note of a story; passively, by setting. An active influence is more rapid than a passive; hence the beginning in which setting is prominent is likely to be longer than that in which tone is fixed by the dominant note. As the tones of stories differ, so also will beginnings differ in length and in nature. Not all tones are capable of the same expression. Some may best be expressed actively, some passively. With regard to the second function of the beginning, character must be present before it becomes possible to sense complication. Since the limits of the Short-story are restricted and since minor characters are introduced simply as they affect a main character or the details of plot develop-

ment, it is natural that main characters should be presented first. Because of their importance they should be granted the emphasis of the initial position. It is not necessary that in the beginning characters be fully described, or that they appear in action; they may be merely mentioned sufficiently to make one sense a new situation. A skilful beginning involves more than the necessity of making a start; it should be in some way significant.

It is usual in stories of character that character is strongly evident at the beginning; in stories of action that action is from the start indicated; in stories of atmosphere that setting is emphasized at the first. Yet aside from their use in indicating the kind of story, these elements of action and character and setting are of value as forms of beginning. Of these forms, action is likely to be the most immediately interesting. It may, even in a single sentence, set the emotional tone and introduce the main characters. Even action may be presented, however, in several ways more or less forceful as they are more or less direct. One may listen to a detailing of a plan for future action, one may hear a record-like statement of past action, or one may actually witness action as taking place. Although many times action offers the quickest way of presenting certain preliminaries, it is not always the best way of beginning.

The presentation of character or of setting, of necessity less definite and less immediately interesting, requires a more extended beginning than does action. Since character is necessary to complica-

tion, it may fittingly begin almost any sort of story. Yet character may be exceedingly interesting or exceedingly uninteresting, according as its presentation is of a living being or of an animated stick or company of sticks. Combined with action, character is much more natural and to that extent more effective as a form of beginning. Setting is used as a beginning, for the most part, in stories of atmosphere or in stories where atmosphere or setting is important as an influence. Since, however, it is valuable in effecting emotional tone, it may be used as a beginning for almost any sort of story. A gloomy description makes one gloomy, a bright description makes one joyous, a description of things vague and but half-seen makes one dreamy. Rarely will any of these forms of beginning be present to the exclusion of all others. They will be mingled in varying degrees. Thus their advantages may be combined.

Sometimes one finds another sort of beginning — that which consists of generalizations on the theme or purpose of a story. Such an introduction is really a prelude to the actual beginning. In generalizations themselves, one can sense no complication. One must await the beginning of the application, which is not expository but narrative in method. This generalized form rarely adds to the force of a story; it is not vital. It may set the tone, but it cannot easily introduce the main characters. While in many cases introductory generalizations are mere commonplaces of mediocrity, sometimes they are so

originally expressed that they are of real value in giving the spirit of a story. A dull and awkward beginning is a mark of a dull and inartistic story. Unnecessarily long or irrelevant introductions are foreign to the nature of the Short-story and but hamper progress.

A beginning, whether long or short, should from the first arouse interest of some sort. It should be so uniquely suggestive of character, of action, of setting, that it will awaken curiosity and stimulate to further reading. A first sentence need rarely set in motion a whole story. Yet it should win attention. It may arouse interest by any one of several slightly varying ways. Perhaps the simplest of these is to put the reader in a questioning attitude. The first sentence may seem incomplete or vague: it does not tell all that one wishes to know. It stirs up in the reader's mind questions which it leaves unanswered. In the hope of satisfying curiosity, one continues to read. An opening sentence, however, may present no questions; it may in itself be mildly interesting and put the reader in a receptive mood in which he is willing simply to settle back in his chair and listen. Or it may create an unsatisfied longing for one knows not what — just as does an autumn day or a curve in the road ahead. It calls one away from the commonplace, and lures one on by its simple charm. Rarely, it becomes still stronger and irresistibly grips one with the intensity of its gloom or brightness. At times, the first sentence

may be but a fact statement made impressive by the unusual significance of its content. Occasionally, too, an unexpectedly exact description, in a first sentence, of something familiar, rouses not only one's admiration, but a question as to the reason for such exactness. All these forms are but slightly varying appeals to one's curious interest. The first sentence should have the power of stirring this interest; every sentence thereafter, that of sustaining it until a narrative complication is sensed and the story is under way.

In order to illustrate these principles, it may be worth while to examine several beginnings in their completeness. The one-sentence beginning of *The Cask of Amontillado* has been already quoted and its strength suggested. Direct and vigorous as it is, it scarcely surpasses the opening words of *The Revolt of Mother:*

"Father!"

"What is it?"

"What are them men diggin' over there in the field for?"

The first word makes one listen. It is insistent. The answer but continues the question in one's mind. The next sentence is still a question. It relieves one's anxiety. There has been no accident in the home. Yet it arouses more than curious interest. One wonders why so simple a question demanded so much urgency. The "diggin' over in the field" evidently means more than curiosity

to the questioner. Something was going on which she had a right to know and did not know. She had not been consulted. A tone of wounded sensibility is felt. At this point, one may be said to sense complication. There is trouble of some sort in the air. In this beginning, the main characters are introduced, and the special anxiety of the questioner singles her out as of the two the more important. Though the beginning takes the form of action, both character and action are plainly indicated as entering into the story.

Markheim begins:

"Yes," said the dealer, "our windfalls are of various kinds. Some customers are ignorant, and then I touch a dividend on my superior knowledge. Some are dishonest," and here he held up the candle, so that the light fell strongly on his visitor, "and in that case," he continued, "I profit by my virtue."

The first sentence here puts the reader at once into a questioning attitude. To whom was the dealer talking? In what was he a dealer? Of what sort were his windfalls? What had just been passing in conversation? All of these questions arise from the first sentence. They are not all answered even when one has read the whole of the beginning, for as one reads, one's curiosity is turned to suspicion. The visitor's purpose becomes doubtful. Perhaps he is not a simple customer. Complication is sensed and the story begun. The main

characters have been introduced, the dominant tone of restless suspicion has been set. The beginning fulfils all that is demanded of it.

To these short beginnings that of *Mrs. Knollys*, comprising the whole of the first section, presents a contrast. More than a page is given to the description of the Pasterzen glacier, more than two pages to a description of Charles and Mary Knollys. Not until the end of the section, when Charles Knollys slips into the crevasse, is there any sensing of possible complication. Meantime, we have been made acquainted with the main characters and have seen the glacier slow and silent in its moving, "like a timepiece marking the centuries." As the shadows of the planets find reflection in the face of the glacier and the moonbeam in the face of Mrs. Knollys, so the tone of quiet strength of the one seems echoed in the changeless affection of the other. Character and atmosphere thus mingle in creating a single impression. The beginning is long because of the necessary harmony between structure and tone. The spirit of the glacier could not be expressed in a few short, hurried sentences. It must be impressed slowly and gradually. Here, too, the long waiting through five and forty years must find its counterpart. Notice even the first sentence:

"The great Pasterzen glacier rises in Western Austria, and flows into Carinthia, and is fourteen or seventeen miles long, as you measure it from its

birth in the snow field or from where it begins to move from the higher snows and its active course is marked by the first wrinkle."

Slow in movement, mildly interesting in content, this sentence puts the reader in a receptive mood during which he is willing to listen to anything which may follow.

The first sentence of *They* provokes no questions. It does more than put one in a receptive mood; it creates an unsatisfied longing. Although one senses no complication until the appearance of Miss Florence, one is interested from the first in the beauty of shifting landscape. Like the narrator, the reader is called by a lingering curiosity from one view to another, from "one hill top to its fellow half across the county" — until one has passed over the Downs and along the coast and through the wooded hills to the ancient lichened house and has seen the children looking out from mullioned windows. Here is set a dreamy, vague atmosphere in which indeed a Shakespeare or a Queen Elizabeth might appear and call one in to tea. It is with quickened interest, then, that one greets Miss Florence and finds that she is blind. Surely one is about to encounter some unusual experience. Here, then, one may set the limit of the beginning. The tone of mystery has been set. Even the children are out of reach and seem of the atmosphere. The main characters, too, Miss Florence and the narrator, have been introduced.

A long beginning was here made necessary by the elusiveness of the story's tone.

The beginning of *The Masque of the Red Death* extends through the first sentence of the second paragraph. The opening sentence interests one because of the startling significance of its content: "The 'Red Death' had long devastated the country." The remainder of this paragraph of expository setting, by thrilling one with its extreme awfulness, sets the emotional tone of horror. It is, however, not until the first sentence of the second paragraph that one senses complication. "But the Prince Prospero was happy and dauntless and sagacious." This sentence sounds the note of alarm. Something is about to happen.

After Twenty Years begins with descriptive character-sketching and setting. Until the third paragraph, when the policeman and the stranger meet in front of the hardware store, there is no possible chance for complication. Character and setting have both combined in giving the tone as one of security. The shops are closed for the night, the rain has driven the people off the street. A policeman alone is seen on his round. Then when he meets a stranger in the door of a darkened hardware store, suspicion arises. The first sentence here is different from any yet examined. "The policeman on the beat moved up the avenue impressively." The description at once appeals because of its exactness. To move impressively is the manner of all policemen. Yet the picture pre-

sented is so familiar that exactness is unexpected and awakens immediate interest. From the first sentence to the last, the beginning is skilful.

The Man Who Would Be King begins with a generalizing prelude which sets the "happy-go-lucky" tone of the whole story. The first sentence is not interesting. The motto to which it refers is, however, interesting. It is doubtful whether the first paragraph adds anything to the interest already awakened by the motto. The second paragraph suggests the rather unusual setting of a rather unusual story. It is not until the third paragraph, when the narrator and the huge gentleman in shirt-sleeves come in contact, that complication is sensed. The main characters of the outer story are introduced, and the story is begun. Within this first story, Daniel Dravot, who is to become the main character of the inner story, is introduced. When Carnehan returns to tell the story of his adventures, the inner story begins. The picture of the man now scarcely recognizable as a human being stirs curious interest, but when Carnehan says, "Kings we were, with crowns upon our heads — me and Dravot — poor Dan — oh, poor, poor Dan, that would never take advice, not though I begged of him!" complication is sensed. One tone serves for both stories, for the two are after all one complete story.

It is evident that beginnings may vary widely, yet be equally perfect. They may be long or short, descriptive or expository, indicative of complication in the first sentence, or but mildly interesting.

They are whatever the nature of the story dictates as best. It should be yet more clearly evident, too, how close is the relationship between the end and the beginning. Until the end has been determined, the method of the introduction of the main characters cannot be determined or the tone settled upon.

VI

THE TITLE

EVERY story has a name which differs from ordinary names in that it is in some way indicative of the story it represents. It may be derived from the theme, the subject, the characters, the setting, the dominant motive of the main character, or from any of the important structural expedients, as the fancy and the judgment of the writer dictate. In any case, a title should be significant and justified by the story. Although simply a heading, it may serve finally to bring home the power of a story. From the end, one turns back instinctively to the title for comparison. If possible, then, the title should seem the crowning expression of a story. Yet its first use is without doubt to point forward, since from the beginning the reader is on the watch for its explanation. It may excite curiosity and attract the reader, or it may repel him entirely. Because a title fails to claim attention or to make just the appeal which should be made, a good story is frequently passed over unread. At times the writer may chance upon an effective title, but probably more often chooses it carefully in accordance with the nature of the story. Whether it occurs to one of a sudden or whether it is deliberately

sought out, a good title will rather generally be found in keeping with certain definite principles.

First of all, the good title is brief. It is in no sense a résumé, it is not the full story packed in a few words; it is a hint, a suggestion. It may be one word, and in that case the word must be exceedingly expressive. It may at times be a half-dozen words. A good title, however, needs only occasionally to go beyond this limit. The length of a name does not add dignity, and it may detract from suggestiveness. Names are ordinarily short, because there is no necessity of their being long. A long title suggests a long and rambling story. It inclines one to believe that the writer has had difficulty in cornering his ideas. A short title, however, does not necessarily represent a short story. A definite idea demands terse expression. It is as wrong to tell too much and quell curiosity at the start as it is to intimate too little and fail to excite interest. Here, as in most things, there is a happy mean.

The good title, too, is found to be unique. It is so individual, so strikingly new and original, that one's attention is immediately fastened upon it. It is so distinctive that one cannot fail to notice it. The value put upon uniqueness is easily seen, when one considers the striving there is after something new in the way of advertising. When something surprisingly original appears among advertisements, it is greeted with general applause, and for the time its appearance is almost as popular as that of a new piece of ragtime or of slang. It is imitated in

every conceivable way until it ceases to interest, and wears on the reader's patience. The case in literature is analogous. People are always searching for the unused. They have an eye always open for new expressions, new comparisons, new epithets. A fresh title is esteemed of great value. It is certain to be attractive, because it is unexpected and untried. It is just as certain to be imitated. *The Man Who Would Be King* and *The Man Who Was* are good titles, unique and pleasing. If, however, one glances down a catalogue of present-day fiction, *The Man Who* — did this or that, will appear two or three times a page. This title has become so common that it falls flat upon the imagination. One can scarcely over-emphasize the need for the unworked and the distinctive in titles.

It is for this reason that names of characters often fail as story titles. A name must be unusual and of striking connotation to stand at the head of a story. *Markheim* is not distinctive. There is nothing in the name which indicates anything unusual in the character. One might easily pass the story by. Even *Mrs. Knollys* fails to attract attention. Knollys is, to be sure, an uncommon name; yet there is nothing in its sound which makes a definite appeal. Unless a name seems indirectly to indicate something of a character, it would better be unused. Often, however, character stories seem most naturally named for their main characters, and at times it may be more important to have an appropriate than a unique title.

The third requisite of an ingenious title is definiteness. One gains from the name some clear idea of what the story is about. The title is not vague nor capable of being interpreted finally in several different ways. It should not be a blanket term, which by the extent of its possible meaning fails to give any sharp impression. A general term may easily be applied to a story, but it has no individual flavor; hence it does not excite interest. Fruit does not mean plums; flowers do not make one think of violets. Balzac named one of his stories *An Episode Under the Terror*. The story deserves a much stronger name. Anything might be an episode, and anything might have happened during The Terror. One does not know what to expect. It is the business of a title to particularize, so that there will be something around which one's thoughts may gather. *The Tragedy of a Comic Song* seems also ineffective. Definiteness of association goes far toward making a title.

In addition to being definite, a felicitous title is honest. It represents truly the story for which it stands. Relevant and appropriate, it gives not only a definite impression but a true impression. It refers not to something which is of little or no significance, but to some character, or action, or motive, or setting, which enters into the life of the story. Without being too exact, it may accord with the single impression and in some sense prepare the reader. *The Cask of Amontillado* is an honest title, for the cask is the decoy which Montresor uses

in leading Fortunato into the damp vaults. When there is any mention of desisting, one always hears echoing the single exclamation, "The Amontillado." Although honest, this title is perhaps less exact than that which Maupassant has chosen for his story of revenge, *Une Vendetta*. It is, however, decidedly more unique and attractive. *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* is an honest title; so is *The Revolt of Mother;* so, *The Necklace;* so are nearly all the titles of good stories. Absolute honesty is perhaps the first thing sought in selecting a title. Whatever the name may be, it should be able to stand the test of the reading of the story, and should not leave one wondering, when all is said, as to its application.

Careful writers see to it that their titles are pleasing; that is to say, that they seem in good taste. In making stories there is always use for a sense of propriety. There are many titles which might startle one into attention, yet be essentially vulgar. A story of real artistic merit has a name æsthetically fit, just as has a beautiful poem. Here *The Brushwood Boy* deserves mention. It suggests a free, unsophisticated naturalness, which arouses pleasing anticipations. There seems in it a joyous freedom unhampered by restraint. No less pleasing is *The Merry Men*. In addition to their suggestiveness, both of these titles are euphonious. So, truly, is *Marjorie Daw*, which in other respects fails to make any unusual impression. Euphony is valuable, of course, but alone it does not make a name effective. Even in the titles of his most sensational stories,

Poe is careful not to offend simple good taste. He rarely uses an unpleasing title. *The Fall of the House of Usher* has a certain rhythm in its movement. *Berenice* is certainly restrained. A definitely pleasing title, however, is always an advantage.

It is still more important that the title of a story should be thought-arresting and compelling. It is not enough that it catches one's attention; it must hold one by the force of its suggestion. It should be a spur to one's imagination and set one to thinking actively. *The Madonna of the Future* is such a title. It is modest and unassuming and might easily head a magazine article. Yet it is honest, unique, pleasing, and thought-compelling. The word "Madonna" is associated neither with the present nor with the future, but with the past. To paint the Madonna was to embody the ideal in art. "The Future" suggests the indefinite, the unattained and perhaps unattainable. Thus to link the two ideas in one title is at once to suggest the whole range of thoughts which may cluster around the striving after an ideal always just beyond. The title seems almost an expression of yearning which cannot fail to arrest and compel one's attention, and remain as a haunting memory in one's mind, long after the story is read. The really powerful title is always thought-compelling.

Yet in making a title thought-compelling, all the qualities previously mentioned have a share. Notice *They*. It is short, consisting not of four words, but of four letters, which when united form only a pro-

noun. It might refer to things or to persons, — though one naturally gives the preference to persons. Whether they are men, women, or children; whether they are in the flesh or in the spirit, one does not yet know. It is obviously unique. In some sense, too, it is definite, for it points to several persons who are already known so familiarly that one can refer to them thus in perfect understanding. Its indefiniteness is its fitness, its honesty. *They* are the center about which the story is built. *They*, as a title, is pleasing because it seems half-veiled in mystery; and it is thought-arresting and compelling because it is crowded full of unrealized possibility. It could not have been so thought-full, however, if it had not been first brief, unique, definite, honest, and pleasing.

VII

CHARACTERIZATION

In a powerful story, with excellence of form there will be found blended excellence of characterization. It is, nevertheless, the restricted form of the Short-story which makes the task of characterization especially difficult. The means of drawing character in the novel and in the Short-story are essentially the same. The only difference is that, while the novel is unrestricted, the Short-story requires an intensive application of methods. While in the novel one may listen at leisure to a recital of the hero's characteristics and watch him develop through two or three hundred pages, in a multiplication of episodic incident and in crisis after crisis; in the Short-story one watches the main character in but a single full crisis and sees him portrayed in few pages, by a limited amount of incident and scant description. The Short-story must not devote time and space to non-essentials. Characterization should be of the swiftest. A few sketch-strokes must be made to do the duty of whole pages in a longer narrative. Yet the character must be definite, true, and lifelike. From the way a character meets the single crisis, one should be able to judge how he would act under

other circumstances. His measure should be taken, so that one may know whether he is a great man capable of great things or a little man capable only of petty things. By what is said, much that is left unsaid may be suggested. The essence, almost, of a man's character should be indicated by means which seem perhaps no more than the habitual expression of that character. Such finesse of character drawing seems almost impossible; yet a hand has been so painted as instantly and unmistakably to suggest the person to whom it belongs. So, also, a Short-story may suggest a character in its entirety.

Such characterization will bring all one's powers of imagination, of observation, of reflection, of sympathy, of insight, into play. It will demand a sure technique, a deft touch, a discriminating knowledge. A character is not simply a record of personal appearance and external peculiarities. It does not consist in a loud voice, an affected accent, a stiff manner, an unusual gesture, a modest glance, or a genteel appearance. All of these things indicate character; they are the outward expressions of the real man, but they are not the real man. A character represents a whole man. It consists of the sum of a man's habits, physical, mental, and spiritual. One wishes to know how a man thinks, what are his thoughts, how he acts, how he speaks, what are his prejudices, his joys, his fears, his hopes, his successes, his failures, his loves, his hates, his disappointments, his capabilities, his crowning ambi-

tions. Such things may be hidden to the casual observer. They make up a man's personality, — something too subtle for analysis. They may fail to be observed in one's best friend or to disclose themselves to oneself. Yet they are there for good or for evil, making one man into a murderer, another into a saint. Stress of emotion, or a sudden change of fortune, may reveal a trait which has been for years unsuspected. So many are the variations and shadings of personality that no one individual will appeal in the same way to two persons. At one time a person may seem even-tempered and gentle, at another, quick-tempered and stern. The characterizer has, therefore, a difficult task. He must combine all that he feels a character to be into one suggestive whole. He must know a character so thoroughly that he will reveal not the man's external characteristics, but his personality. He must understand human nature and reflect it with power and much sympathy.

Although it is impossible for a writer to know any one individual perfectly, he may know the character he chooses to portray in a story. The writer may thus reconcile the warring elements of character, make the inconsistent seem consistent, and the imperfect seem perfect. The character which he makes will not be a portrait [1] reproducing the exact

[1] "'Later on,' said [de Maupassant], 'when M. Dumas asks me where I found my woman's face, it will be amusing to tell him, In a shrine at *Notre Dame des Doms*, of Avignon. . . . I confess I have not found in that figure all I want for my type of a woman. Still, I saw in that expression of face the uncut

lines of an actual individual; it may be a composite of the characteristics of many individuals, all bound together by one dominating trait. The actual facts may be culled by observation from life, but the character will be shaped by the broodings of imagination. "The character created is not a thing of shreds and patches. It is a new conception." [1] No amount of observing and arbitrary piecing together will make a character worthy of the name. In its making there must enter a vast deal of imaginative insight which will recreate and make a character actually live for a reader.[2] Because a character is

diamond I have to polish. I perceived some artistic details which will be of use for carving my subject, that I hope to make very striking, as near perfection as possible. In my *Angelus* I intend to give all the power of expression of which I am capable; every detail will be cared for minutely without tiring the reader. I feel very well-disposed to write this book, the subject of which I possess completely, and which I have conceived with surprising facility. It will be the crowning piece of my literary career; I am convinced its qualities will awaken such enthusiasm in the artistic reader that he will ask himself if he is in presence of reality or fiction.'" *Recollections of Guy de Maupassant.* By his valet, François. Pp. 287–8.

[1] C. F. Johnson, *Elements of Literary Criticism*, p. 54.

[2] "It is to be noticed, however, — and here, I suspect what Ruskin calls the mystery of the imagination enters, — that this process of abstraction, selection, combination, is mostly not a conscious one. The wholes, though they must doubtless be formed of elements gathered in our experience, *seem* to spring into existence spontaneously. The poet does not laboriously piece together out of his treasured experience the creatures of his imagination; they come to him. The elements of which they are made seem to unite according to some laws of spontaneous combination not entirely under the control of the will." C. T. Winchester, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 121.

the idealized and concrete expression of what one understands of human nature, it may live for one as no actual character may. It may be like no living human being, yet like all human beings.

There is much, naturally, that a man shares with others of his own type or class, and much that belongs to him individually. His character is complex. He is, to a greater or less extent, the product of external forces, the resultant of his own will, and the expression of individual peculiarities. He is all of these variously combined. In so far as he is the product of external forces he may be called typical. The reason is clear: Etymologically, a type is something "struck out"; acted upon, therefore, by an external force. When a great number of things are acted upon by the same external force, they all bear the same stamp; they are typical. Likewise, when a great number of persons are acted upon similarly by the same external force, they are shaped according to the same pattern; they, too, are typical. Every variation in external forces will cause a new type; and the variations may be many. These forces thus acting on a great number of people in the same way one may call environment. The nature of the soil, the contour of the land, the climate, the location beside forest, sea, lake, or river, all affect the people who live continuously in a certain region. Heredity and occupation, too, are forms of environment. Kentucky is an environment; so is prison; so are home training and inherited principles; so is the profession of law. Mr. Theobald

is typical of the artist dreamer; Adoniram Penn, of the stern New Englander. Miss Florence in *They* sings "as the blind sing — from the soul." The typical, though always present in character, is not always necessary to characterization; for the representative may express itself in another way.

People may be grouped according to certain class characteristics which are the resultant not of common external forces, but of common habitual choices or acts of will. When a man makes a choice which will advance his own individual interests, even at the expense of other persons, he is said to be selfish; when he is possessed with a desire to rise above his present self and his present surroundings, to become more important than he is, he is called ambitious; when he does a thing that is hard, because he feels that it is a right thing, he is courageous. When he habitually makes such a choice, he becomes a selfish, an ambitious, a brave man, and is classed along with others who are actuated by a like habitual motive. The characteristic which he has thus in common with a class may be called generic. The generic differs from the typical in that it is produced not by one common external force acting on all persons alike, but by the workings of innumerable like forces within the characters themselves. Phillips Brooks and Senator Lodge may both be called typical of New England, but their likeness goes no farther. Their generic qualities are different. One might conceive an ambitious New Englander, an idealistic New Englander, a truthful New Englander, a cowardly

New Englander, a shiftless New Englander. Yet one knows that these attributes and a hundred others are not limited to any one environment. One must realize, therefore, the qualities that go to make a character typical, as separate from those which go to make him generic. In Mrs. Knollys there is little, if any, of the typical and much of the generic.

One may say, however, that one's environment is frequently a matter of individual choice. One chooses law as a profession, or California as an environment. Yet a man is not brave because he performs a single brave deed. A habit becomes fixed only after an act has been repeated again and again. Daniel Dravot and Peachey Carnehan were ambitious, yet ambition was not necessarily with them a constant aim. They were habitually adventurers, become such by repeated acts of choice. One may decide to be a bricklayer, yet one does not repeat the decision with every new job. Nor does a lawyer reiterate his intention of being a lawyer every time he gains a new client. Choice, in such a case, is final and decisive, and it establishes a permanent environment or external mold of character. A farmer is still a farmer long after he has ceased from active toil. Thus the typical and generic, though closely related, are separate. Of course, there are at times blendings and overlappings. Mr. Oakhurst is in some ways typical of the professional gambler, yet his gambling is the result of many separate acts of will. The typical thus seems to

blend with the generic. Environment, however, may influence choice and to the extent that it does, the typical will assimilate the generic. A drunkard may be such partly because of environment, partly because many repeated choices have with him become a habit. It is home training and early environment that have much to do in developing the state of Markheim's conscience. The variations, the combinations, and the blendings of the typical and generic are almost unlimited. To them, however, must be added yet a third element of character.

In order to be interesting, a character must be shown to possess individual as well as representative qualities. Every person has characteristics which differentiate him from every other person of the same type or class.[1] His individual eccentricities are his, irrespective of any external shaping force or of any habit of will. By means of them a character is made to seem interesting, lifelike, and convincing. Individual characteristics are different in every person: generic characteristics, though resulting from individual choice, are common to a class. It is generic for a man to be ambitious; it is individual for John Flemming in *Marjorie Daw* to throw books at his servant Watkins. Lack of individuality of characterization results in flatness. Love stories seem especially liable to this defect. Their charac-

[1] Cf. Diana's remark, "Women are women, and I am a woman: but I am I, and unlike them." George Meredith, *Diana of the Crossways*, Boxhill Edition, p. 218.

ters are sure to be "popular" and "handsome"; they do the customary things and make the customary remarks, — at least, the remarks commonly supposed to be customary. They are simply lovers, and on that account are supposed to be interesting. In fiction, the proverb that "all the world loves a lover" is not necessarily true. Unless the lover is individual or is involved in unique circumstances, he is simply one of a large class and inspires little more interest than does a toy soldier moved by cleverly arranged springs. Marks of individuality should always be definite, yet not exaggerated. An individual is not necessarily abnormal or queer. It is not necessary continually to call attention to peculiarities. No one quality will make a character individual. Individuality is rather the breath of personality. It may be as definite as the fragrance of a rose and as subtly manifested as the variation in the light-tones of successive days.

Individuality, as expressive of a whole personality, is many-sided, and unites many contrasting elements of character. Adequately to depict it, is not to emphasize it in one particular alone, but to appreciate its varying lights and shades and to blend these in one harmonious whole. To show individuality by some external mark, perhaps a manner of laughing, or a nervous winking of the eyes, is to make a character of wrong proportions; not a true character, but an oddity. Character may be at once fully rounded and individual. Sarah Penn is a woman capable of making her husband listen when he does not wish

to hear her, capable of drawing information from her son when he would rather profess ignorance of this knowledge. She is undaunted and somewhat angered by the attempted interference of the minister. Yet at the last of her talk with her husband she assumes almost a beseeching attitude. She is a careful housekeeper, a faithful wife, and a mother solicitous for her children. At the last, she speaks to her husband almost tenderly. Commanding, capable, faithful, tender, she is withal a resolute woman. Markheim appears with "pity, horror, resolve, terror, fascination, and physical repulsion" written on his face and manifest in his actions. Confronted by his sin, he says of himself, "Evil and good run strong in me, haling me both ways. I do not love the one thing, I love all. I can conceive great deeds, renunciations, martyrdoms; and though I be fallen to such a crime as murder, pity is no stranger to my thoughts. I pity the poor; who knows their trials better than myself? I pity and help them; I prize love, I love honest laughter; there is no good thing nor true thing on earth but I love it from my heart. And are my vices only to direct my life and my virtues to lie without effect, like some passive lumber of the mind? Not so; good, also, is a spring of acts."

Variations are evident between one character and another; changes occur, likewise, from time to time in the same character. Development or deterioration may take place. One expects to see such changes appearing in a novel, whose province

may be the whole of a life. Within the briefer limits of the Short-story, however, it would seem that only the stationary, the unchanged character might with success be handled.[1] The stationary character is more easily treated than the progressive. The portrayal of character change is, nevertheless, a legitimate field for the Short-story. If a change is sudden, one may grasp the moment of its occurrence as Stevenson has done in *Markheim*. Less than an hour probably elapsed between Markheim's killing of the dealer and the time when he gave himself up. Yet in this time Markheim passed his life in review and condemned it. Character development, however, generally takes place more gradually. In *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, it takes six days to bring out the latent good of the characters. During this time of privation and danger the outcasts manifest what would otherwise have remained unsuspected; their characters seem, as it were, to unfold. It is not actual growth that takes place; it is, nevertheless, real development. They are stronger men and women than they were when they left Poker Flat. Mrs. Knollys is less noticeably progressive. The change in her character is a maturing of what has been already seen; it is the change from a green to a fully ripened purple grape.

[1] By development of character in a story one may mean two different things. One may refer to the actual change which takes place in a character; one may mean, on the other hand, the change in the reader's conception of a character from start to finish. Of course, one's idea of character, however, may or may not develop within the limits of the story.

It, too, is a real development. Thus a Short-story may not represent the development of a complete character, but it may show fully the development of character in one respect.

A character, whether stationary or progressive, is best portrayed by what he says and does in the main story-incident. No amount of exposition or description will make us realize a character as does the main incident in which he is involved. In it, the whole man may be displayed. Typical, generic, and individual characteristics appear. The generic which constitutes the motive for action will there be made to reach its strongest expression. Minor incidents may show a character consistent; the main incident will persuade one that a story friend is trustworthy or courageous. To persuade in a story is, however, somewhat different from persuading by force of logic in a cold, scientific treatise. In the ordinary affairs of life, in business, and in science, a man demands proof. He knows well that the strongly consistent act is not the defining act. When he reads a story, however, he adopts a different attitude; his reason is subordinated to his imagination. He is then usually satisfied to judge of character by inference from the strongly consistent act. In his estimate of friends, he acts similarly. Rarely does he see a friend undergo a defining test of character. Because he has talked with him and watched him, because he has found him consistent in all that he knows of him, he accepts him as a friend, never doubting. In a story, further-

more, he trusts the writer's conception of a man, for the writer knew the character more intimately than the reader knows him. If the writer intended the character as such a man, the reader usually asks no further guaranty.

A defining test of a character trait, although perhaps not always essential, is desirable, — especially in the character story. John Oakhurst is defined, for he met the supreme test of his acceptance of chance. Markheim, also, is defined, for he did the thing that was hardest for him to do. Mr. Theobald is defined, for he failed in his masterpiece. Is Mrs. Knollys? Is she not the merely consistent character? Nothing depended on her hopefulness. Charles Knollys would have been found; the old guide would have remembered the accident and would have notified Mrs. Knollys. Yet *Mrs. Knollys* is, first of all, a story of character. Unique circumstances and well-developed atmosphere do much, however, towards intensifying the single impression and making the story powerful. Exact definition of a character trait occurs, though less frequently, in stories of action and atmosphere. In reading *The Masque of the Red Death*, one's interest is so completely absorbed by the description of the ball that one thinks scarcely at all of Prince Prospero. He is not strongly drawn, but he is definitely characterized as a selfishly proud man. Selfish pride governed every act. Such was his motive in retiring with his friends into his castellated abbey; such, in providing the magnificent entertainment for his

guests when others were suffering and dying; such again was his motive in resenting the intrusion of the horribly masked guest. Malicious revengefulness on the part of the main character of *The Cask of Amontillado* is clearly defined. Not only was his act premeditated, but the motive seems also to have been common in his family. A man capable of such a deed would be capable, also, of much lesser acts of revenge. In a story, what a man does or says habitually or premeditatively without influence of reward or punishment indicates his character. If, however, the main character can be shown as acting consistently in spite of the certainty of reward or punishment, the intensity of a characteristic may be measured. The greater the intensity of the characteristic as displayed, the more powerful will be the story.

Thus far, what has been said has applied almost wholly to the main character, as shown in the main story-incident. There are, however, lesser means of characterizing both the main and the minor characters. These means may be either direct or indirect. Of the two, the direct is much the easier and generally much the less effective. It tells facts and informs the reader once and for all what he is expected to believe about a character. It may be purely expository, it may be descriptive, it may be a combination, partly expository, partly descriptive. Such characterization often fails because it is too detailed. The writer has perhaps sought to gain definiteness by comprehensiveness. He succeeds in

boring the reader by a mass of meaningless details. Imagination is given little or no chance. The picture is often but a blur in which one can distinguish scarcely anything and from which a reader wearily turns away. Clearness demands only that the essentials of a character be brought into focus. It is possible to arrange in the mind only a few details at once. Beyond these all others are useless, or worse than useless; for they fail to further the single impression of a story. A character does not consist of details; it is a whole; it is not a bundle of facts to be presented to the reader, but an impression to be made on him. One is not conscious, during one's reading, of all the structural means whereby a story produces its effect; one is not aware of all the details that make up a character. Where details are given, one grasps not a host of disconnected items, but just those few which seem to have peculiar meaning. Unconsciously one fixes upon these, and around them shapes the whole in imagination.[1] They are the part which one has spiritually discerned; they produce a harmonized impression; they enable one to feel a character, not as a specimen, but as a living being.

[1] ". . . but what may be called the incompleteness of imaginative vision does unquestionably add to its charm. We have dropped out of our picture all irrelevant or unpleasing details; our attention is concentrated upon those few features that gave us the powerful and characteristic impression, and all the rest are lost in a dim and hazy background. The whole picture is thus toned into harmony with its prevailing sentiment." C. T. Winchester, *The Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 133.

Any analysis of thoughts and feelings is subject to similar objection, unless a character can be represented as actually saying these things, when the characterization becomes indirect. Occasionally, it is useful to show the way a man thinks. One enjoys, in *Mrs. Knollys*, hearing about the scientist's mental processes:

"He had been wondering what the fish had been going to do in that particular gallery, and secretly doubting whether it had known its own mind, and gone thither with the full knowledge and permission of its maternal relative. Indeed, the good Doctor would probably have ascribed its presence to the malicious and personal causation of the devil, but that the one point on which he and Splüthner were agreed was the ignoring of unscientific hypotheses. The Doctor's objections to the devil were none the less strenuous for being purely scientific."

If long continued, however, the recital of one's ramblings of thought grows exceedingly wearisome. Unless the reader is in perfect sympathy with a character, an analysis seems like a dry record of events. If the situation is intense, the thinking may also be intense and concentrated on one idea. A few sentences of such analysis may then be of assistance in showing a character.

Direct characterization should, whenever possible, be presented gradually, for the obvious reason that exposition and description of any length interrupt a narrative, and thus interfere with the rapid move-

ment of a story. A few words of description or of exposition here and there throughout a story will not thus interfere at all, and by developing one's idea of character little by little may produce an illusion of reality. One may learn to know a character as one knows a friend; each new sight will add to the conception. For several paragraphs in *Markheim* there is no direct characterization of the dealer. Then one is told that ". . . the little pale, round-shouldered dealer stood almost on tiptoe, looking over the top of his gold spectacles, and nodding his head with every mark of disbelief." Four paragraphs later, one is told of his "dry and biting voice." Conversation continues for some time before one sees his "thin blond hair falling over his eyes." After the murder, we hear that his clothes were poor and miserly and that the body looked "strangely meaner than in life." Sarah Penn is characterized directly near the beginning of *The Revolt of Mother* in a paragraph partly descriptive, partly expository. Later, a paragraph is devoted to describing her as a model housekeeper. This paragraph seems almost to interrupt the narrative. In another place she is mentioned as having "a patient and steadfast soul." Again it is said, "She stood in the door like a queen; she held her head as if it bore a crown; there was that patience that makes authority royal in her voice." At the time of the minister's call, "The saintly expression of her face remained fixed, but there was an angry flush over it." Such is the gradual method of

direct delineation. The method of a long unbroken description may, of course, be used, but with less certainty of effectiveness. If it is used, the character may be most naturally presented near the beginning, before the narrative is well under way, and before the reader has himself shaped the character in his imagination.

Effectiveness in direct characterization may be secured, too, if the statements in regard to a character, instead of being expressed by the writer, can be put into the mouth of a narrator-character or of some character of a dialogue. A narrative setting may thus be given which will go far to bridge over any apparent break. Mr. Theobald is seen through the eyes of the narrator-character, and again through those of Mrs. Coventry and of the Signora Serafina. Jimmy Wells, first described by the writer as a typical guardian of the peace, is later characterized by Bob as a friend. Miss Florence is directly described by the narrator-character of *They:*

"The garden door — of heavy oak sunk deep in the thickness of the wall — opened. A woman in a big garden-hat set her foot slowly on the hollowed stone step and as slowly walked across the turf. I was forming some sort of apology when she lifted up her head and I saw that she was blind."

Later he says, "She stood looking at me with open blue eyes in which no sight lay, and I saw for the first time that she was beautiful." Delineated thus

in relation to the narrator, she seems not like a wooden figure set up for us to look at, but a living human being. The description is a part of the narrative itself.

Indirect characterization, although perhaps more difficult than the direct, is also, when skilfully used, more effective. One may learn something of a character from direct statements about him; one judges far more by inference from his speech and his actions. One compares him with other men, notices the attitude he inspires in them, watches his dealings with them, listens to what he says to them. The indirect is thus the illustrative method; it is the expression of fact by concrete examples. Its manner is narrative. Instead of benumbing his imagination, it encourages the reader to form his own estimate of a character. A policeman may be said to be a typical "guardian of the peace," but he is more accurately characterized by his act in turning over a criminal, his one-time friend, to justice. It may be said that a woman is a model housekeeper. One prefers, however, to watch her at work in her house. The act is more convincing than the fact statement.

It is nearly always true, however, that in the Short-story both methods are used, the one to supplement the other. One may tell of the play of a man's emotions or of his dominant motive, and then illustrate them in speech and action. One may say that Mrs. Knollys was hopeful and then show her exemplifying this hopefulness through

many years of waiting. One may call John Oakhurst a gambler, calm and clear-headed, then show him standing erect while the other outcasts are under the influence of liquor, or, after the theft of the mules, refusing to waken the sleepers. "The big, simple-hearted guides" express their sympathy for Mrs. Knollys by their willingness, in a pretended attempt to find her Charles, to descend into the crevasse. There may thus be a proposition and its demonstration. The indirect method may extend even to the direct, for even from a direct statement one may draw inferences. External characteristics, thus, may not simply assist vividness of visualization; they may contribute also to the expression of the intimate personality of a character. By harmonizing external characteristics and character, an inference from a direct, may be made to parallel an inference from an indirect, statement. Characterization may thus gain additional strength.

Although the methods are different, the materials of direct and indirect characterization are much the same. Of course, some materials lend themselves more naturally to one treatment, some to the other. Action lends itself almost exclusively to the indirect handling. It is true that in *The Cask of Amontillado*, Montresor begins with the statement that his story is to be of an act of revenge, premeditated and perpetrated under a guise of friendship. He brands himself and his act at the beginning. Usually, however, an action is allowed to be its own comment on character. Notice one

of the details of revenge. In assuming a guise of friendship, Montresor keeps continually urging Fortunato to go back to avoid risk to his health from the dampness of the vaults with their nitre-encrusted walls. By such feigning, he disarms any suspicion that might have arisen in the mind of his victim. Then finally, after he has chained Fortunato securely in the niche, he turns again to say:

"Pass your hand over the wall; you cannot help feeling the nitre. Indeed, it is very damp. Once more let me implore you to return. No? Then I must positively leave you."

All the cruelty and vengefulness of Montresor's nature are there suddenly revealed. One is thus constantly doing things that reveal character. In refusing himself to arrest his one-time friend, Jimmy Wells reveals a certain tenderness. But for the evidence of the milk tallies of the interview with Turpin in *They*, one might almost have questioned Miss Florence's reality. She is shown to be strict in business and aware even of the tricks of her tenant.

Another means of characterization is to show the effect that one character has upon another. One person may inspire fear, or admiration, or confidence, or suspicion, or disgust, in another person. It is comparatively easy to state that one person impressed another in a certain definite way. "Even the phlegmatic driver of their *Einspänner* looked back out of the corner of his eye at the *schöne*

Engländerin and compared her mentally with the far-famed beauty of the *Königsee.*" It is said, too, that Mrs. Knollys felt "almost like confiding" in the German scientist, for he was "the oldest gentleman she had seen." These, however, are at best merely direct statements. It is a far more difficult task to show an effect as produced, and yet not seem to drag into the story unnecessary incident. Notice how skilfully Stevenson has shown the suspicion that the curio dealer feels of Markheim. When Markheim winks and turns aside from the candle, thrust suddenly before his eyes, the dealer's suspicions are evidently increased. He remarks "a certain manner" in his customer. He jumps back when he is suddenly confronted by the hand-mirror. The reader, too, is made suspicious, and is prepared for what is to follow. The device is here obviously effective.

Personal appearance is of comparatively slight value for characterization in the Short-story. There is no time for elaborate description of how a man appeared or of what he wore. Generally, only a few words are given. Even these may frequently be omitted without much detriment to a story. Only such details of personal appearance are used as serve in some definite way to further one's idea of a character. Daniel Dravot is known chiefly by a flaming red beard and Peachey Carnehan by his "eyebrows that meet over the nose in an inch-broad black band." Both men, too, were large. Aside from these statements, however, little else is said of the personal

appearance of the adventurers. The descriptions, such as they are, serve as tags of identification and to mark these men as in some way extraordinary. Notice the description of "Silky" Bob:

"The man in the doorway struck a match and lit his cigar. The light showed a pale, square-framed face with keen eyes, and a little white scar near his right eyebrow. His scarfpin was a large diamond, oddly set."

The description is short, but careful. Its purpose is, first, to serve as a basis of later identification. It fits exactly, however, the character of Bob, the smooth criminal. It is a hard face which arouses one's instinctive suspicion. One wonders immediately about the cause of the little white scar.

Mr. Theobald, when first seen by moonlight, appears merely an artist with an artist's hair and costume. Later, seen by daylight, he is described in more detail. He is older than he first seemed:

"His velvet coat was threadbare, and his short slouched hat, of an antique pattern, revealed a rustiness which marked it an 'original,' and not one of the picturesque reproductions which artists of his craft affect. His eye was mild and heavy, and his expression singularly gentle and acquiescent; the more so for a certain pallid leanness of visage which I hardly knew whether to refer to the consuming fire of genius or to a meagre diet."

There is not an item of this description but adds

to the effect of the whole story or deepens one's impression of the artist. Every detail harmonizes with the character as a whole. More use is here made of costume than is general. The costume, here, however, is uniquely expressive of the man. Otherwise it would have been but lumber, detracting from the effect of the whole. Costume and personal appearance that are not uniquely characteristic of an individual are, in the Short-story, worse than useless.

Not only personal appearance, but names are suggestive of character. They should, therefore, be chosen with care. Poe wrote fantastic stories, and he fitted his characters with fantastic names. In many of his stories he seems to show a fondness for the liquids and for the long vowels, for they harmonized with his effects. Eleonora, Ligeia, Morella, Madeline, are some of his women. His men are not so unusual. Still, one notices Prince Prospero, Fortunato, and Montresor. No one cares to imitate his names. They would not suit our stories nowadays. Yet one may well follow his example in fitting a name to a character. Mary, Sarah, Elizabeth, and Kate are much used for simple home-loving women. Writers of love stories seem to have a fondness for Marjorie and Dorothy. Similar differences are noticeable in the names applied to men in stories. John and James, Robert and William, with the corresponding Jim and Bob and Bill are frequent for the ordinary man, while characters in any sense unusual have less common

names. There is no rule. Every person knows that a wrong name will jar, and every person has a feeling for names appropriate to this or that character. Usually such a feeling is a safe guide.

It is useful sometimes to tell of a character's accomplishments. One may judge him not only by what one sees him doing, but also by what he has done. By the nature of an accomplishment, one may learn something of a man's innate aptitudes; by the difficulty of the task and by his failure or success in it, something of his strength. Dravot introduces himself and Carnehan thus:

"Now, Sir, let me introduce to you Brother Peachey Carnehan, — that's him, — and Brother Daniel Dravot, that is *me*, and the less said about our professions the better, for we have been most things in our time. Soldier, sailor, compositor, photographer, proof-reader, street-preacher, and correspondents of the *Backwoodsman* when we thought the paper wanted one."

One has already heard something of Carnehan's ability as pretended correspondent of the *Backwoodsman;* one is to learn later of Dravot's successful mimicry of a mad priest. The men are clearly eager for adventure and capable of adapting themselves to any sort of life. To see them later "crowned kings of Kafiristan" is no greater surprise than to know that they were once proof-readers and street-preachers.

To characterize a man by his accomplishments is

more rarely done than to characterize him by his environment. A man may be placed in an environment which serves simply as a stage setting for his action. As such, it may influence him and leave its mark upon him, but it is in no sense expressive of his character. For environment in its broad sense, a man is not responsible; for environment in its narrower, more restricted sense, a man may be responsible. Thus, a person is to a certain extent judged by the room he lives in, by the books he has around him, by the magazines he has on his table, by the pictures on his walls. In mentioning with contempt Mrs. Coventry's appreciation of art, Mr. Theobald speaks of "that horrible mendacious little parlor of hers, with its trumpery Peruginos." A woman, too, may be judged by the scoured brilliancy of her pots and pans, and by the general neatness of her house. One knows something of Prince Prospero when one has noticed the gorgeous furnishings and hangings of his apartments. One knows something of Adoniram Penn from the fact that he would have two barns for his animals and for his crops, and would live himself in a small, uncomfortable house. Miss Florence arranged her rooms so that they would be attractive to children. There was always a fire in her hearth. In many slight ways, perhaps by a sentence here and there, characteristic environment may be indicated.

Yet perhaps the most common and most important material of characterization is speech. A man

is judged by what he says and by his manner of saying it. Some men are fluent, and their words hurry forth in a torrent; others are reserved, and find difficulty in speaking. Some speak in affected language; others use simple and natural words. Some speak with every semblance of frankness; others as if they were disguising themselves or their thoughts. Some are calm and deliberate, others are excitable. All these differences in manner show differences in character. Notice the German scientist's slow and formal discourse. His mind is bent on science. Notice Mr. Theobald's enthusiastic discourses on the beautiful and the true. In all speech, however, manner and content are so intermingled that one need not distinguish them in their effect upon characterization. The contrast between Carnehan and Dravot expresses character, alike by its manner of expression and by its content. Each of the men displays himself frequently in characteristic speech. Carnehan when advised "not to run the Central India States as the correspondent of the *Backwoodsman*," because "there is a real one knocking about," answers:

"Thank you, and when will the swine be gone? I can't starve because he's ruining my work. I wanted to get hold of the Degumber Rajah down here about his father's widow, and give him a jump."

Notice, too, the following speech of Mr. Theobald when asked whether he had been very productive:

"'Not in the vulgar sense!' he said, at last. 'I have chosen never to manifest myself by imperfection. The good in every performance I have reabsorbed into the generative force of new creations; the bad — there's always plenty of that — I have religiously destroyed. I may say, with some satisfaction, that I have not added a mite to the rubbish of the world. As a proof of my conscientiousness,' — and he stopped short, and eyed me with extraordinary candor, as if the proof were to be overwhelming — 'I've never sold a picture! "At least no merchant traffics in my heart!" Do you remember the line in Browning? My little studio has never been profaned by superficial, feverish, mercenary work. It's a temple of labor, but of leisure! Art is long. If we work for ourselves, of course, we must hurry. If we work for her, we must often pause. She can wait.'"

He is a dreamer, pure and simple.

The speech of characters is generally in the form of conversation. However effective it may be, good conversation is exceedingly difficult to write. The first requirement of good dialogue is that it should seem easy, natural, and spontaneous. It should not be stilted and formal, as if the characters were talking out of a book. It should not be ornate. It should not go to the other extreme and be filled with unnecessary slang and colloquialisms. It should, so far as is possible, be made to resemble actual conversation. The second requirement of

good dialogue is that it should be interesting of itself. It should have a point. The policeman and Bob might have talked about the weather and all sorts of commonplaces, yet they did not. Unless conversation is of some value in furthering progress, the story will be better without it. Ordinary conversation is full of irrelevancies. These must not appear in a story. If conversation is to be really interesting to a reader, it should be thoroughly interesting to the participants. It is most natural and most interesting on occasions of more or less dramatic intensity. Yet where there is dramatic intensity, care should be taken that there be no violation of propriety. Under unusual stress, people do not express themselves. Conversation in *They* is subject to frequent pauses. The most natural and interesting conversation is that which imitates most closely ordinary people in their moments of animated discourse.

VIII

ATMOSPHERE

Much that has been said of characterization may be applied with equal aptness to the making of atmosphere. Every story has a setting of some sort, — an environment of time or place or circumstance. Every story has, also, an atmosphere which is the vitalizing influence of this environment and varies as does the peculiar aspect of the setting. This atmosphere is an effect, pervasive as in nature, intangible, vague, and elusive. It is always present, though not always in equal intensity. Among the mountains, atmosphere is rarified; at sea level, it is dense. In some stories it is scarcely realizable; in others it is an influence strongly felt. It never makes itself felt as a distinct sensation, but rather as a pervading sense of depression, or of stimulation, or of apprehension, or of any of a man's many moods. Frequently it is derived from association. For many people, the sight of falling leaves causes depression. Yet to the eye the sight is undoubtedly beautiful, and it becomes depressing only because of its associational meaning. A century may have an atmosphere, a dominating influence, — so may a town; so, too, may a person or a group of persons. When the interest of a group of people centers on thought and knowledge, there results an intellec-

tual atmosphere. Where all their thought is of business success, they create a commercial atmosphere. Thus, also, an atmosphere of gaiety or of solemnity may be produced. It is impossible to show atmosphere in a story except by indicating the distinctive and associational elements of setting.

Atmosphere may have another aspect. While it may be expressed by setting, it may also affect setting. The sun looks red or yellow, the moon yellow or white, according to the medium through which one sees them. Hills may look distant or near at hand as the condition of the intervening atmosphere varies. Sometimes, one can see individual trees along the horizon and the windows of houses several miles away; sometimes, the trees and houses near one are scarcely distinguishable through a fog. At times, too, one may see things in clear and sharp definition in one direction, while they are veiled in mist or haze in another. Atmosphere may even show things strange and unreal. It may subdue sharp outlines, it may distort, it may magnify, or it may define. In a story, similar effects of atmosphere are utilized to modify or intensify impressions of persons and things.

Atmosphere is all-pervasive. It affects all parts of the story alike. It is the medium through which we see all the characters, all the events. It colors everything as does a red glass through which we look out upon a landscape. Even things in natural contrast are brought under one influence. Thus, all elements subdued and harmonized by one atmos-

phere yield finally a single impression. It is in strengthening single impression that the chief value of atmosphere consists. "The consciousness of the presence of the spirits of little children" is the single impression of *They*. The atmosphere is such that this impression is possible. It is of unreality and mystery, full of shadows where spirits may hide at will, just out of reach. In *Mrs. Knollys*, an atmosphere of low but persistent emotional tension brings out the beauty of a triumphant hope. The scientist offers a hope. Yet its realization depends upon the certain but almost imperceptible motion of a glacier, dispassionate, unrelenting. Through forty-five years this inevitable tension lasts. Only as one waits for the time to pass and for the glacier to let go its hold can hope be actually triumphant.

The force of atmosphere in *After Twenty Years* is less immediately evident than it is in the two stories just noticed. As nearly as one can express it, the single impression seems to be the grip of duty. It is fidelity to duty which Jimmy Wells shows when we first see him, it is official obligation which leads him to turn over his friend to justice. It is, also, faithfulness to obligation which brings back the criminal Bob to meet an appointment made with his friend twenty years before. This single impression appears to the best advantage against the background-atmosphere of the power of the social order. This atmosphere is felt by both characters alike. Even Bob, so used to ignoring duty, who, professionally, has been butting for many years against

the social order, recognizes one of its natural bases in fulfilling the promise made to his friend. Here the atmosphere actively promotes the growth of single impression. The dominant tone of security, felt, too, at the beginning, finds echo throughout the story in this power of the social order.

One of the most frequent means of producing atmosphere is description. It may, however, be easily abused. In the Short-story, description is simply a means, not an end in itself. If prolonged beyond what is needful, it may defeat its own purpose and dissipate the atmosphere. It may, too, interfere with narrative progress. Yet it cannot be denied that description has large suggestive power for atmosphere. One's feelings are altogether different in a stretch of virgin forest from what they are on a city street. They are likely to be entirely different on a bracing day in January from what they are on the first wilting day of summer. A change in scenic background may quite alter one's impression of the course of events. Description, however, even as characterization, should be kept within bounds of definite purpose. Details may be jumbled together. A rubbish heap, rather than a picture, results. One should pick out that which is uniquely significant, that which will make the reader feel about the thing described exactly what the writer felt. The writer must have a sense of the fitness of things that will enable him to lay his finger on just that which will yield the full suggestion. The swift stroke which calls up a host of

suggestions is, in the Short-story, vastly more effective than a long, much-detailed description. An effective narrative description should be presented not to the intellect, but to the imagination. To describe, therefore, one needs to be sensitive to the appeal of things and to their common associations.

It would be difficult to find descriptions more perfectly adapted to the needs of a story than are those in *They*. It has already been noted that an atmosphere of unreality and mystery is needed in this story for the full expression of the single effect. The description at the beginning — much the longest in the story — impresses one with its beauty and its compact suggestiveness. The first paragraph is especially full of association:

"One view called me to another — one hill-top to its fellow — half across the county; and since I could answer at no more trouble than the snapping forward of a lever, I let the county flow under my wheels. The orchid-studded flats of the East gave way to the thyme, ilex, and grey grass of the Downs; these, again, to the rich cornland and fig trees of the lower coast, where you carry the beat of the tide on your left hand for fifteen level miles: and when at last, I turned inland, through a huddle of rounded hills and woods, I had run myself clean out of my known marks. Beyond that precise hamlet which stands Godmother to the capital of the United States, I found hidden villages where bees, the only things awake, boomed in eighty-foot lindens

that overhung grey Norman churches, miraculous brooks diving under stone bridges built for heavier traffic than would ever vex them again; tithe-barns larger than their churches, and an old smithy that cried out aloud how it had once been a hall of the Knights of the Temple. Gipsies I found on a common where the gorse, bracken, and heath fought it out together up a mile of Roman road; and a little further on I disturbed a red fox rolling dog-fashion in the naked sunlight."

It is worth while to examine this description somewhat more closely. Its elements crowd one upon another. Hints, yet only hints, are thrown out to the imagination. One catches but passing glimpses of the country as the automobile speeds along. There is no stopping here to analyze botanical specimens. The manifest hurry adds to the general lack of certainty. Yet every sentence is full of associations. Orchids and fig trees, one associates with the luxuriance of a warm climate. They are suggestive here because they are outside the pale of everyday experience. Ilexes are bound up with the lore of antiquity. The sea is always full of silent mystery to the beholder. "Hidden villages where bees, the only things awake, boomed in eighty-foot lindens over grey Norman churches," suggest almost a land of enchantment, where silence and memory of the past may reign supreme. Even the smithy turns one's thoughts backward. There appear gipsies, always mysterious, for they are

like the wind of which it is said that "no man knoweth whence it cometh or whither it goeth." When, after following a mile of Roman road, one disturbs a red fox rolling in the naked sunlight, one feels fully away from the hard and fast lines of routine and free to let the imagination roam at will. The wooded hills may close about us, and the hazel stuff meet over our heads and we are content, not knowing what strange experiences may be just beyond. The atmosphere of mystery and unreality is here produced by reference to things beyond one's ordinary experience, to things belonging to a time long past, and to the beauty and serenity of nature through which one is rapidly whirled.

There are other descriptions in *They*, shorter but just as effective. Throughout the story there is much indirectness and indistinctness. The woods are full of summer noises, the children's voices rise in murmurs, the sunlight is chequered. One sees "the wayside grasses rising and bowing in sallow waves," "the long shade possessing the insolent horsemen one by one," and the mirror in the dusky hall "distorting afresh the distorted shadows." The description which marks the third visit of "the man from the other side of the county" shows "summer England" turned to "blank grey." Yet, while it seems to hold more life, more stir of people, and perhaps less of unreality and mystery, than does the description at the beginning, it holds, also, more gloom. It has a cruel charm — an atmospheric background well fitted for a climax

where, with understanding, comes, also, anguish of spirit. *They* is a story of atmosphere, and every description gives added strength.

One might, too, notice the descriptions of *The Masque of the Red Death* in their effect on atmosphere. The greater part of the story is given over to a description of the prince's apartments and to the revelings of the masquers. There is little of action, little of character, but much of atmosphere. Every detail contributes something of the weird and the grotesque to the scene. There is luxuriance so hypernatural that it affects one with intense gloom and an almost ominous disgust. The colors as they follow one another, vivid blue, purple, green, orange, white, violet, black, seem those of morbidity rather than of light and life and health. No natural light reaches these rooms, for the windows are all of stained glass corresponding in colors to those of the rooms. In the black room alone, the panes are different — and here they are of red. The actual atmosphere of the rooms is thus made to seem unnatural. Even the dancers in their fantastic costume seem to take hue from their surroundings. Moreover, what light there is in these rooms must waver and flicker, answering to the rising and falling of flames in the braziers without. The atmosphere is uncanny. Almost anything unnatural and terrifying might happen amid such surroundings.

Experiential association invests most facts of common life with the power of affecting atmosphere. Singly they may do it; a combination, as has just

been shown, may make a description electric with atmospheric force. These objects, facts, or events may appear simply as momentary effects, or as incident. The rapid strokes of a fire alarm make one apprehensive. The tolling of a bell depresses, the jangling of a gong stimulates, the ringing of chimes soothes. These are but single effects. They might, however, be expanded into complete emotional incidents. The striking of the ebony clock in *The Masque of the Red Death* is an incident described in detail. The muffled peal which comes only to one within the black room is a mere effect. All of a person's moods, whether of seriousness or exhilaration, may be expressed by incident. Once expressed, they contribute to atmosphere, — for moods pass easily from one person to another. A whole group may be set to laughing simply by watching another person laugh. All emotional incidents contribute, however indirectly, to atmosphere. They should be designed with care, therefore, that they may strengthen the prevailing atmosphere. By telling stories of Homeric heroes to while away the time, the outcasts of Poker Flat encourage one another to a like heroism in an atmosphere of impending disaster.

For examples of the creation of atmosphere by emotional incidents and mood effects, one cannot do better than to turn again to *They*. The shyness of the children is insisted upon until they, too, seem of a part with the atmosphere. One catches the "glint of a blue blouse" among the horsemen and

again in the shrubbery. One hears the "tread of small cautious feet stealing across the dead leaves," and then their rapid retreat. A child clinging to the skirt of Miss Florence suddenly runs "into the leafage like a rabbit." One sees *them* "frolicking like shadows among the swaying shadows," and at the end of a passage one glimpses "the silhouette of a child's frock against some darkening window." One sees them clearly only when they are out of reach, — looking down from some window high above. All the while, they seem unreal and mysterious. Yet not until one has neared the end of the story does one guess that they are more than merely very shy. These are all but effects. Listen to this incident:

"The children had gathered themselves in a roundel behind a bramble bush. One sleek head bent over something smaller, and the set of the shoulders told me that fingers were on lips. They, too, possessed some wonderful child's secret. I alone was astray there in the broad summer light."

It is a minor incident, but it is all atmosphere. In this story, even the incidents of movement have much emotional value.

In making a natural, thoroughly true atmosphere, one will often find use for contrast. Every atmosphere has its blending tones, its almost infinite shades of light and darkness, its ever-changing odors. At one moment it may seem fairly to sparkle, and the next it may relapse to dull though clear transparency. One breath may fairly suffocate with its load of dust,

while the next may carry the fragrance of lightning-splintered pine. The atmosphere of stories, too, is often made more effective by the presence of varying tones. Every strain must have its times of momentary relaxation. Without hope, despair cannot be fully appreciated. Gloom must be enlivened by gaiety. Shade but makes the brightness brighter.[1] Suspense is heightened by relief. After the brief period of sunshine, the storm clouds seem to gather more closely around the outcasts of Poker Flat and the snow falls more thickly. The atmosphere of impending disaster, temporarily lightened, settles again and envelops them. In the midst of music and attempted revelry, the awfulness of the Red Death strikes more deeply than it otherwise could.

The value of contrast for atmosphere is well illustrated in *The Cask of Amontillado*. The revenge occurs during the carnival season. Montresor finds Fortunato dressed in motley and wearing the appropriate conical cap and bells. In this man who has

[1] "If the artist introduces every tone into the story he thereby gets hold of every tone in the spectator's emotional nature; the world of the play is presented from every point of view as it works upon the various passions, and the difference this makes is the difference between simply looking down upon a surface and viewing a solid from all round: the mixture of tones, so to speak, makes passion of three dimensions. Moreover, it brings the world of fiction nearer to the world of nature, which has never yet evolved an experience in which brightness was dissevered from gloom; half the pleasure of the world is wrung out of other's pain; the two jostle in the street, house together under every roof, share every stage of life, and refuse to be sundered even in the mysteries of death." R. G. Moulton, *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, pp. 292-3.

entered into the reckless jollity of the carnival season, ready to give or to receive a joke with equal good grace, Montresor finds an easy victim. Until the last, Fortunato remains unsuspecting in the presence of that which at another time might have aroused his suspicion and occasioned his withdrawal from the vaults. In the carnival season, however, he is prepared to follow mirth to the end, expecting even a semblance of seriousness to turn out a merry jest. Thus he is led unaware into the spider's trap. Cruel, premeditated revenge and unsuspecting good fellowship stand facing each other, and the one seems more fiendish because it is in the presence of the other. Turning now to the last paragraph, one finds these words:

"No answer. I thrust a torch through the remaining aperture and let it fall within. There came forth in return only a jingling of the bells."

The reader's interest has been bent on the details of the revenge. Just as it is completed, one catches once more a view of the carnival jollity. Then follows the silence of death. The atmosphere of utter vindictiveness stands out in its intensity.

One finds foreshadowing, too, a device sometimes of use for atmosphere. By its suggestion it may serve to make an atmosphere more appreciable; it may be actually contributory. It requires, however, no little skill, for the writer must so arrange his details that they will constitute a real though veiled intimation of the outcome. It may influence one's

mood and prepare one for a future event without actually revealing its intent. It may appear either in description or in incident. In *The Outcasts of Poker Flat*, the storm is foreshadowed by description. The air grows strangely chill, the wind moans, the sky is ominously clouded. Near the beginning of the story, the Duchess in her petulance declared "that she would die in the road." As one reads, one passes this remark over lightly. In the light of later developments, however, it seems a bit of carefully designed foreshadowing. The strongest foreshadowing in the story, however, appears when the outcasts join with Piney and The Innocent in singing the two-line refrain:

> "I'm proud to live in the service of the Lord,
> And I'm bound to die in His army."

This incident forms almost an unwitting recognition of an atmosphere of impending disaster. As if to clinch this impression, the next sentence adds:

"The pines rocked, the storm eddied and whirled above the miserable group, and the flames of their altar leaped heavenward as if in token of the vow."

One frequently finds stories in which the atmosphere is influenced, in part, at least, by local color, — which is the setting forth of the distinctive peculiarities of a definite locality or period. There are many possible settings for a story which would be as fitting for one section of a country as for another. They are not distinctive. Rainy days or sunny skies are much alike wherever they are found.

A distant range of hills does not settle the locality of a landscape. Only when setting is uniquely peculiar to one locality can one speak correctly of local color. Such setting can be expressed either in incident or in description. It is natural, as a result, that some stories should be written with the sole purpose of exhibiting local color, while others should use it simply as a fitting and picturesque background. In either case, it may have a contributory influence on atmosphere, to which it is akin much as the fragrance of apple blossoms is akin to the air we breathe. Local color may so pervade an atmosphere that it is felt as a distinct flavor and affects one's emotional outlook. In *The Madonna of the Future*, Florence is so displayed in her character of mistress of art and of the artistic spirit that one is made fairly to breathe an atmosphere of idealism. It is this atmosphere which makes Mr. Theobald's failure so possible yet so pathetic. Throughout *The Man Who Would Be King* the influence of local color is felt strongly, for it is the searching after something new, — something that will be in contrast to one's everyday experiences, — that is at the basis of the adventurous spirit. It is the contrasts that are emphasized by the local color in this story. One example will suffice. The description is of the Native States:

"They are the dark places of the earth, full of unimaginable cruelty, touching the Railway and the Telegraph on one side, and on the other, the

days of Harun-al-Raschid. When I left the train I did business with divers Kings, and in eight days passed through many changes of life. Sometimes I wore dress-clothes and consorted with Princes and Politicals, drinking from crystal and eating from silver. Sometimes I lay out upon the ground and devoured what I could get, from a plate made of a flapjack, and drank the running water, and slept under the same rug as my servant. It was all in the day's work."

Local color is expressed also in the speech of characters, and here it is called dialect. Dialect is interesting because of its novelty. In some stories, it is made the main point. It is, however, difficult to reproduce on paper accurately and suggestively. To write it successfully, one needs to have lived long enough in a community to have acquired the exact accent and manner of speech of the people. Aside from its novelty, dialect is of little value in a Short-story. It has little meaning for atmosphere. Words, to one who is unfamiliar with them, possess little connotation. Their quaintness or suggestiveness may fail to arouse the sympathy of a stranger. Sometimes, naturalness demands that a character use a dialect. Yet, usually, the same things expressed by the same people in plain English will suggest vastly more to the ordinary person, and will be of more real value for atmosphere. How style is a factor in producing atmosphere will be considered in the next chapter.

IX

STYLE

The style-qualities of the Short-story are not essentially different from those of any other branch of prose fiction. Of course, there must be clearness and order, but these should not be strangers to any style. They spring from clear and orderly thought. There must be also concreteness and suggestiveness of style; and these are common to all good narrative. There may be present, too, humor, pathos, animation, directness, nervousness, simplicity, picturesqueness, naturalness, vividness, or any of the numerous other qualities as they are so varyingly named by those who gather them into lists. Yet none of these are the property of the Short-story exclusively or of any other form of prose. The brevity and condensation of the Short-story, however, make it a good vehicle for the display of some of these qualities in more than their ordinary development. No rules can be laid down as to a proper style for the Short-story. Every story is a law unto itself, as is every poem. An individual creation of the imagination, its style will depend on the form, on the subject treated, and on the personality of the writer. This threefold division is true in all art. Tennyson's lyrics are of one sort; Wordsworth's, of another.

Chopin's preludes are utterly different from Bach's. Corot painted landscape in one way; Ruysdael, in another. The best style for a given story is that which is the most perfect expression of what the writer intended to say and of the impression he wished to convey. To attempt to lay down any binding rules for Short-story style would be foolish and hazardous. Yet there are certain general principles upon which even the variations are based, principles derived from the essential nature of the Short-story as a form of fine art; and these it may be well to consider briefly.

As has been shown, the modern Short-story has a rather rigid form; and because of this form it lends itself to greater relative perfection than would otherwise be possible. It is brief, it is dramatic, it makes a single impression which is predominantly emotional. Since it is brief, it must be direct; since it is dramatic, explanation and analysis will be subordinate to speech and action; since it must give a single emotional impression, it must be simple and intense. Naturally, such results are attained only when the workmanship is of the finest at every stage of the making. There must be a delicate adaptation of all possible means in securing the requisite artistic effect. Not only must plot and structure be skilfully wrought, but style, also, should add grace and poignancy. It is the finishing which brings out the grain, and gives distinction and refinement to rougher work. Yet style is never sought for itself alone, but only as it is of service in making the story

grip the reader's imagination with the sense of reality as a living experience. To this end, language may be used in almost infinite variations of word and phrase and sentence. The interest of plot should be such that one will eagerly await the outcome, yet the mere reading should be a joy. Through fitting language, the emotional effect may weave itself through the story until it subtly pervades the spirit of the reader. One finishes a good Short-story with regret as well as with satisfaction. Its brevity, yielding more intense emotion than could a longer narrative, makes one's conscious enjoyment the more lively. Narrative of any sort is an appeal to the imagination and will demand imaginative language, yet it may contain much, also, which makes a purely intellectual appeal. In the Short-story, however, there is a closer unity; what counts for plot advancement must serve also for emotional intensification. Form and content both make their demands on style, and both call for vividness.

The style, however, is determined finally by the nature of the individual story. What is appropriate for one may not accord with the spirit of another. *They*, for example, and *The Man Who Would Be King* are both Short-stories and both by Kipling, yet their styles are utterly different. Just how they differ, it is perhaps difficult to say, but any one will recognize the fact. Each style fits the story to which it belongs, so perfectly that it contributes to the story itself. It has already been noted how the descriptions in *They* are made to produce atmosphere.

There is throughout them a certain daintiness and airiness. In *The Man Who Would Be King*, however, one is aware of a wholesome enthusiasm. *Mrs. Knollys* is almost discursive. Terseness would have been inappropriate. It is in the nature of this story to linger over the details. The story is simply told, too, for such a struggle against the sternness of nature would be offensive if told grandiloquently. The style is adapted to the story. In the stories of O. Henry, we deplore the carelessness with which asides are thrown in, the apparently needless profusion of slang; yet we laugh and sympathize, — not because the stories themselves move us, but because they are told with the zest of one who is experiencing them. They seem natural, and it is a duty of style to leave an impression of naturalness. We should never enjoy *By Courier*, for instance, but for the inimitable translation of the man's message into the street-boy's language. Naturalness or propriety of style in the Short-story requires that every speech should sound appropriate in the mouth of the one who makes it; that every word and phrase and sentence should be in harmony with the prevailing idea of the story.

The principle of greatest economy of means together with utmost emphasis applies, also, in style. In the excellent Short-story we find dramatic intensity, a pruning away of all which does not in some way add strength. In the style, the spirit of the story is distilled. Words have their full value and do not appear as mere colorless terms. Every

sentence strikes home with its message of suggestion. Ideas gain by being compressed in their statement. The direct style need not be beautiful, it needs to go straight to the point without hesitation. Two selections from *The Outcasts of Poker Flat* will illustrate. The first explains itself:

"In point of fact, Poker Flat was 'after somebody.' It had lately suffered the loss of several thousand dollars, two valuable horses, and a prominent citizen. It was experiencing a spasm of virtuous reaction, quite as lawless and ungovernable as any of the acts that had provoked it. A secret committee had determined to rid the town of all improper persons."

When the outcasts have been for a week snowbound, we have this instance:

"And yet no one complained. The lovers turned from the dreary prospect and looked into each other's eyes, and were happy. Mr. Oakhurst settled himself coolly to the losing game before him. The Duchess, more cheerful than she had been, assumed the care of Piney. Only Mother Shipton — once the strongest of the party — seemed to sicken and fade."

In directness of narrative style probably no one has surpassed Guy de Maupassant. Notice these paragraphs from *The Necklace:*

"She was one of those pretty and charming girls, who, as if by a blunder of destiny, are born in a

family of clerks. She had no dowry, no expectations, no means of being known, understood, loved, married by a man rich and distinguished, and so she let herself be married to a petty clerk in the Department of Education."

. . . . . .

"She had no dresses, no jewelry, nothing. And she loved nothing else; she felt herself made for that only. She would so much have liked to please, to be envied, to be seductive and sought after."

. . . . . .

"She came to know the drudgery of house work, the odious cares of the kitchen. She washed the dishes, using her rosy nails on the greasy pots and the bottoms of the saucepans. She washed the dirty linen, the shirts and the dishcloths, which she hung to dry on a line; she carried the garbage down to the street every morning and carried up the water, stopping at each landing to rest. And, dressed like a woman of the people, she went to the fruiterer's, the grocer's, the butcher's; her basket on her arm, bargaining, abusing, defending sou by sou her miserable money."

Equally direct is the following paragraph taken from Leonard Merrick's story, *Little-Flower-of-the-Wood:*

"'I am very poor and ill,' she went on. 'I have been away in the South for more than two years; they told me I ought to stop there, but I had to see

Paris once more! What does it matter? I shall finish here a little sooner, that is all. I lodge close by, in a garret. The garret is very dirty, but I hear the music from the Bal Tabarin across the way. I like that — I persuade myself I am living the happy life I used to have. When I am tossing sleepless, I hear the noise and laughter of the crowd coming out, and blow kisses to them in the dark. You see, although one is forgotten, one cannot forget. I pray that their laughter will come up to me right at the end, before I die!'"

Simplicity is closely akin to directness. As in the paragraph just quoted, they are found together. Notice the character of the words. They are nearly all those that a child might use, — note how many monosyllables. They are everyday words, — 'garret,' 'dirty,' 'tossing,' 'noise,' 'laughter,' 'happy,' 'crowd,' 'blow.' The sentences are short, for beneath these words there is intense emotion. Profound emotion is always simple and seeks simple expression. The homely word and phrase fairly bristle with associations. They have power to move, for we feel them as concrete things. If there is an attempt to adorn, we feel a jar at once. The rococo in language is certain to detract from the real effect and to produce a counter impression. Nothing over-ornate — ornate to impress rather than to express — nothing unintelligible, nothing florid, nothing full of allusions of purely intellectual character, nothing insincere, may pass openly and unchallenged through the gates of the Short-story.

We are all children in that we like stories at all; and the more simple they are in the manner of their telling, the more do they awaken our childlike and elemental sympathies. We sit around a fire, — perhaps a camp-fire, — of an evening to hear a story told. If it has not been prepared for the occasion, but flows on simply, and naturally, and spontaneously, we like it the better. The spirit of the teller and the spirits of the listeners all seem to enter in to cover the deficiencies, and to fill in the pauses with recalled experiences. Such a story *Mrs. Knollys* seems. We for the time belong to the group of listeners. Surely, it was not first told into a typewriter. It is too tender, too simple, as if it were rising from the heart of him who tells it. Here is but one paragraph:

"There were but two events in her life — that which was past and that which was to come. She had lived through his loss; now she lived on for his recovery. But, as I have said, she changed, as all things mortal change, all but the earth and the ice-stream and the stars above it. She read much, and her mind grew deep and broad, none the less gentle with it all; she was wiser in the world; she knew the depths of human hope and sorrow. You remember her only as an old lady whom we loved. Only her heart did not change — I forgot that; her heart, and the memory of that last loving smile upon his face, as he bent down to look into her eyes, before he slipped and fell. She

lived on, and waited for his body, as possibly his other self — who knows? — waited for her. As she grew older she grew taller; her eyes were quieter, her hair a little straighter, darker than of yore; her face changed, only the expression remained the same. Mary Knollys!"

To be simple, however, is not to be commonplace. Whatever helps toward the intimate realization of a scene, of an incident, of an emotion, be it attained even by a conscious striving after the artistic in expression, need not offend simplicity. Language which stimulates imaginative activity in a way that enforces the effect is, in the Short-story, legitimate. By an artful choice and arrangement of words imbued with feeling, language may give rise to an atmosphere, as boiling water throws up steam. In poetry, the subtle sympathy of content and music as expressed by imitative word, by metres, rhythms, and rhymes, becomes a factor in one's appreciation and enjoyment. In the Short-story, too, language may affect atmosphere by touching one's creative memory. It cannot be fashioned in the manifold patterns of poetry, but it can bring to the story all the other graces of word choice and order.

In making a vivid impression, picturesqueness of style is often of service. Words which compel one to visualize promote one's lively experience of the things themselves. They put one in a certain attitude of receptivity; they strike a sensitive chord

in the reader. In short, they create an atmosphere, which, by according with the general atmosphere of the story, gives it added forcefulness. Three times in *Mrs. Knollys* we are sent out by night to look at the glacier, the mountain, and the changing sky with its moon and stars:

"The glacier has a light of its own, and gleams to stars above, and the great Glockner mountain flings his shadow of the planets in its face."

The glacier seems changeless, the mountain above it remains unmoved, the stars are fixed in their places and move only in accordance with an immutable law. They shine upon the glacier, but they are as powerless to hurry its motion, as it is to influence theirs. While one watches the snowy surface of the glacier gleam upward and the planets reflected upon it, one is possessed with a nameless awe. Unwittingly, we are already cloaked deep in an atmosphere of tension.

In some stories, as in *They*, this picturesqueness forms a large factor in atmosphere. One is forced to look, and when one has looked, one has fallen under the spell of its witchery. The picturesqueness of this passage is particularly notable:

"The red light poured itself along the age-polished dusky panels till the Tudor roses and lions took on colour and motion. An old eagle-topped convex mirror gathered the picture into its mysterious heart, distorting afresh the distorted shadows, and curving the gallery lines into the curves of a ship.

The day was shutting down in half a gale as the fog turned to stringy scud; through the uncurtained mullions of the broad window I could see the valiant horsemen on the lawn curvet and caracole against the wind that pelted them with dead leaves."

In many stories such a picture as this would seem mere verbiage; in *They* it is a part of the atmosphere. It is the restless motion which catches and rivets attention.

Another use is made of motion in *Markheim.* The tremulousness which the guilty murderer sees in everything about him is the first evidence of his nervousness, the first token of any waverings of conscience:

"The candle stood on the counter, its flame solemnly wagging in a draught; and by that inconsiderable movement, the whole room was filled with noiseless bustle and kept heaving like a sea: the tall shadows nodding, the gross blots of darkness swelling and dwindling as with respiration, the faces of the portraits and the china gods changing and wavering like images in water. The inner door stood ajar, and peered into that leaguer of shadows with a long slit of daylight like a pointing finger."

One would have missed the suggestion in large measure, if not entirely, if Stevenson had written instead:

The lighted candle stood on the counter, and by the inconsiderable movement of its flame the whole

room was filled with noiseless bustle, with tall shadows and gross blots of darkness, with the blurred faces of portraits and china gods.

This picture would not have been compelling, it would not have served the author's purpose. It is the movement, the 'wagging,' the 'heaving,' the 'swelling and dwindling,' the 'changing and wavering' which make the picture count for atmosphere. Here, greatest economy of means has given way to utmost emphasis with a gain to atmosphere that is past telling.

One notices in this paragraph that figurative language is used to make the picture definite. We are told exactly with what to make comparison instead of being allowed vaguely to sense these comparisons for ourselves. Because of its value for conciseness, a figurative style is often found even in the Short-story. We are brought to see two things and wherein alone they are alike. One's experience of the thing described is sharpened by being brought into exact focus. Each object, too, has a suggestion of its own, and these things taken together imply a richness which neither has in itself. One might wish to make it plain that a certain man was angry. We should perhaps speak of the contraction of his brows, the rapidity of his expression, of his tone of voice; we should quote his words. All this description, unless of course it was the main point of the story, would be less definite, less forceful than the more simple, more vehement

expression, *He stormed.*[1] Naturally, in the Short-story, where one is seeking the greatest possible impression in the fewest possible words, such figurative language is valuable. *Markheim* is full of such language:

"Meanwhile, and behind all this activity, brute terrors, like the scurrying of rats in a deserted attic, filled the more remote chambers of his brain with riot, the hand of the constable would fall heavy on his shoulder, and his nerves would jerk like a hooked fish, or he beheld in galloping defile, the dock, the prison, the gallows, and the black coffin."

"Terror of the people in the street sat down before his mind like a besieging army."

"Like some dripping cavern, the chambers of the house were haunted by an incessant echoing."

"The solid walls might become transparent and reveal his doings like those of bees in a glass hive; the stout planks might yield under his foot like quicksand and detain him in their clutch."

The dealer "was sunk beneath seas of silence." Markheim himself "was smitten into ice." He would "plunge into a bath of London multitudes"; he would be "buried among bedclothes."

Markheim is unusually tense; it treats of a critical moment, of a life turning-point. The murderer is

[1] When verbs can thus be made to do duty, there is an increase in the forcefulness of expression, for verbs actively indicate the desired comparison without delaying movement.

in a state of high nervous excitement. Temporarily, he has lost mastery of himself. He is panic-striken, intoxicated with horror at his own deed. Thoughts and feelings flee through his mind in wild disarray; all uncontrolled, former experiences flood past him. This condition is expressed actively by language in a luxuriance of imagery. While simple emotion, however profound, results in style simplicity, a conflict of emotions, resulting in excitement, provokes figurative expression. In *Mrs. Knollys*, where the tension is low and the emotion simple yet profound, figurative language would have been highly inappropriate. If the language is not the trenchant expression of that which the story demands shall be the experience of the reader, it is a mere daub. Figurative language in the well-wrought Short-story never serves as mere ornament. It is confined to those comparisons which are subtly but emotionally illuminative.

As has been intimated in a preceding chapter, sounds, also, are conducive to atmosphere. These, too, may be represented in language with more or less distinctness. Words and sentences may have tone-color: they may heighten emotional appreciation by a careful adaptation of sound-values. We are all aware of the significance of the purely imitative words: *chatter*, *crash*, *thunder*, *boom*, *tinkle*, *gurgle*, *whisper*, *creak*, *roar*, *bang*, *patter*, *purr*, *snarl*, *hiss*, and countless others. We all take pleasure in using those other words which are not directly suggestive of sound, yet through their own

sound manifest the meaning. We feel such words as *jerk, swoop, wag, whirl, swell, bubble, wiggle, skip, pump.* These make for vividness anywhere. Yet sentences as well as words may simulate sound and affect one's mood. *Markheim* again offers illustration:

"The thought was yet in his mind, when first one and then another, with every variety of pace and voice, — one deep as the bell from a cathedral turret, another ringing on its treble notes the prelude of a waltz, — the clocks began to strike the hour of three in the afternoon."

Or again:

"And as he began with great effort to mount the stairs, feet fled quietly before him and followed stealthily behind."

Poe, too, was ever watchful of the movement of his sentences and the successions of vowels and consonants, as the following passage from *The Masque of the Red Death* well illustrates:

"And these — the dreams — writhed in and about, taking hue from the rooms, and causing the wild music of the orchestra to seem as the echo of their steps. And, anon, there strikes the ebony clock which stands in the hall of the velvet. And then, for a moment, all is still, and all is silent save the voice of the clock. The dreams are stiff-frozen as they stand. But the echoes of the chime die away — they have endured but an instant — and

a light, half-subdued laughter floats after them as they depart. And now again the music swells, and the dreams live and writhe to and fro more merrily than ever, taking hue from the many-tinted windows through which stream the rays from the tripods."

The effect is not far to be sought. It is in the perfect adaptation of sound to sense. This is one of the means which style possesses of affecting atmosphere. Yet language is a delicate instrument and atmosphere, a dainty drapery; and both, the masters of the Short-story have handled with consummate care.

He who attempts this task must himself be exceedingly sensitive to emotional effects. He must be able to estimate words and phrases for what they are, to know what expressions have lost their original verve, and which are still aglow, — for some have grown cold in being passed from one to another, and some are just coming into being. He must have, throughout, that harmonious nicety of touch which comes only from the response of his own nature to his subject.

X

THE PERSONALITY OF THE WRITER

Thus far we have treated the Short-story as a form, as a technique. Yet one should never lose sight of the fact that technique alone cannot make an admirable story. Faultless technique is necessary in the Short-story as in the sonnet, but it is not the final test of worth. We praise a musician's technique, yet we rightly enjoy the performance only when it shows warmth of feeling. The Short-story form has become common; it greets us on every side. Story-writers who have mistaken technical skill for true art have sprung up like weeds in a meadow. The result is that people are well-nigh sated with inferior work. If in the last half dozen years the Short-story has seemed to degenerate, if it has come to be regarded as more or less of a dissipation by people who enjoy strenuous thinking, it is small wonder. People who have not thought keenly and felt sincerely can imitate a form; they cannot make literature. If as much prominence were given to cheap, imitation poetry whose only virtue is a close adherence to a strict metre, a definite rhyme-scheme, and a well-regulated rhythm, as there is given to the same sort of Short-story, we should gain a highly inadequate and absurd idea

of the real value and beauty of poetry. There is a Short-story which is more than form; one which we care to remember as we do a good poem. We read it again and again. It, too, has a rigid form, but it has what technique can never give, a personal element. It is written in emotional fervor by those who have tasted life in some of its sweetness and bitterness, and who are ready to speak their vision out of a full heart.

All writing, except the purely scientific, is an expression of the personality of him who writes it. Facts are the same in their essence to every one. The plain statement of fact is like absolute zero. It is entirely devoid of warmth; it has no fringe of feeling. So soon, however, as it ceases to stand by itself in space and begins to come into relation to people, it becomes interesting. It impresses us in some way. We feel certain things about it. It is then that our individuality enters. No two of us are alike, and no two of us will have exactly the same feelings about a given fact. Realizing this divergence of feeling, we are anxious to compare and share our experiences. In the narrow world about us, in the circle of our friends, this is easily accomplished. We smell a bunch of lilacs, then hand it to our friend. We watch a beautiful sunset, and we call others to see it, that they may share our joy. We stand on a hill-top in the fall of the year, and we point out one object after another: the gum-trees turned dark red, the sun shining on the bare poplars, the mingled yellow and green and

russet of the maples. All these objects we name because we are unwilling that another should miss their beauty. Even then, very often, some one is unsatisfied, and in the attempt to make realization more vivid, utters some platitude. He says that the hill looks like a tapestry or a veiled Persian silk. He is trying to express himself. Only in an exceedingly limited way can we thus bring anyone into actual contact with that which we feel as beautiful or interesting. That which stirs our feeling and prompts our instinct for self-expression may be largely or wholly beyond the sphere of the senses. It may be an experience, spiritual in its nature; a touch of pity for misfortune; a joy in the well-won victory of a noble aspiration; a bitter indignation for some deed of shame; a thrill at some heroic act. We feel as before the same impulse to express ourselves. Voice and gesture do not now avail. Writing comes in. Paper and ink become the medium for our vision. So literature is born, when such experience and such desire come to a great soul.

It follows that he who writes has a real vision to impart, and that he is not writing merely for effect. "To invoke ideas with words is a much more difficult experience than the reverse process," says John Burroughs.[1] It is not only more difficult, but more fruitless. We write that another may share our thrill; and unless we have genuinely felt it, we cannot impart it. Literature always bears the impress of personality; a man writes himself

[1] *Literary Values*, p. 73, Riverby Edition.

into his work. If he has no message, he delivers none; if he has seen beauty in the world, it is beauty that he shows us; if he has seen pain, and cruelty, and ugliness, and pettiness, he will represent these; if he understands only facts, he will give us facts. It is just as true that one man sees and feels what another may pass by. What seems dull commonplace to one, may be music to another. "Two men have the same thoughts; they use about the same words in expressing them; yet with one the product is real literature, with the other it is a platitude." [1] The difference is in the personality of the men. Behind the worthy novel, the great poem, the powerful Short-story, there is a sincere personality revealing itself in literary form. The world is interested in personality. It is not so much the facts that a man sees that interest us; it is the facts become a part of the man himself. Beauty comes to every one differently, for each infuses something of his own life into what he sees. Some more than others have this power of revealing themselves. The friends of Phillips Brooks are said to have been satisfied simply to sit in his study and watch him work. Ordinarily, however, we expect to listen to men as they talk, or to read what they write, and thus to come to see through their eyes, to touch their spirits, to feel the irradiation of their personalities.

All literature demands personality as a basis. Yet he who would write stories must have certain

[1] Burroughs, *Literary Values*, p. 59, Riverby Edition.

qualities specially developed. First of all, the good story-teller has the intellectual ability of grasping facts, — facts of all sorts — scientific facts, narrative facts, imaginative facts, historical facts, — just plain facts. He sees everything around him. He knows the feel of the winds, the tones of the foliage, the effects of the fogs, the movements of the butterflies, the chirping of the crickets. He knows people; he studies their appearance, their manners, their habits. He needs to know how they talk to their dogs and how they look when they are doing a washing. No knowledge, however trivial, is to be scorned by the story-writer. He observes details, the little facts; yet he does not let the more important escape him. We are constantly astonished at the minute and diversified knowledge which Kipling displays. We have reason to believe that this information did not come to him unsought. He was always questioning, watching, experiencing. O. Henry has told us with what painstaking he gathered his facts. He never met any one, he said, from whom in the course of a conversation, he could not gain some valuable information. Maupassant was an indefatigable observer, as his stories testify. He sought not only the facts themselves, but he sought to penetrate to their essential nature, — to see what differentiated them from other like facts. In his oft-quoted Introduction to *Pierre et Jean*, he says: "In everything there is still some spot unexplored, because we are accustomed to look at things only with the recollection

of what others before us have thought of the subject we are contemplating. The smallest object contains something unknown. Let us find it. In order to describe a fire that flames, and a tree on the plain, we must keep looking at that flame and that tree, until to our eyes they no longer resemble any other tree, any other fire." It is this minute and careful observation which, so far as he is able, every Short-story writer must cultivate.

Along with a knowledge of facts, the story-teller has the imaginative ability of realizing what he has not personally experienced. He is called upon to write many things which have not been in his own narrow life. Yet through his imagination he is able to correlate his facts, and make his picture. What he reads, what he hears told, these he sees as if they were passing before him. Thus he is able to sort out the congruous from the incongruous, to distinguish the natural from the unnatural, to know when passion is fitting, and when coolness. He is able to enter into the life of those he depicts, to appreciate their circumstances, to understand their motives, — even when these things would not be his own. He needs to be able to put himself temporarily in the place of his character, to think his thoughts, to do his deeds. How understandingly Stevenson shows us Markheim. He entered imaginatively into the situation. Poe had perfect imaginative insight into the character of Montresor. From beginning to end, the story shows Poe's ability to penetrate into the deep-seated vindictive-

ness of the man. Not that it possesses this quality conspicuously above other portions of the story, but as an illustration, let us look at this passage:

"Here I knocked off the neck of a bottle which I drew from a long row of its fellows that lay upon the mould.

"'Drink,' I said, presenting him the wine.

"He raised it to his lips with a leer. He paused and nodded to me familiarly, while his bells jingled.

"'I drink,' he said, 'to the buried that repose around us.'

"'And I to your long life.'"

In a flash, Montresor has realized the unwitting appropriateness of Fortunato's toast, and in the cool consciousness that he is already drinking to the buried, though living, Fortunato, he answers, "And I to your long life." So thoroughly had Poe imagined situation and character that he could unerringly represent Montresor in this moment of vindictive foresight. It is hard to surpass in the representing of utter fiendishness this gloating over the long hours of living death soon to overtake the victim.

Along with his imaginative insight — an intellectual quality — the story-writer needs sympathy, which is emotional in nature. He need not represent that which is unbeautiful as beautiful, or that which is not good as good. Sympathy is not partisanship. It is the ability to feel that which one has already realized of a situation intellectually. Steven-

son had imaginative insight, but along with it sympathy. How fully Kipling caught the spirit of Miss Florence, and how sympathetically he has portrayed it. How unreservedly Mr. Stimson has let himself feel the love, the despair, the hope of Mrs. Knollys. One may coldly enumerate the details, the events of such stories, but the stories will never live unless one puts life into them. Life is always warm; a cold relation of life can only chill. Stories are written not in the mood of scientific analysis, but of lively enthusiasm.

Because Guy de Maupassant was unwilling to influence his readers, he adopted the dispassionate attitude. He robbed his stories of much that might have made them real. Perfect in form, they yet seem more the productions of a machine than the warm creations of a man's imagination. His people are interesting. He describes them as he would have described a tree or a stone. We admire his grasp of facts, his ability to make an imaginative situation, but his stories live only objectively for us. We watch Madame Loisel, we are sorry for her sufferings, we appreciate the irony of the result; but we never suffer with her. The writer himself was a spectator, and we, too, are but onlookers at a struggle. Observation has supplanted realization. The story is a fact but not an experience. Mr. Esenwein says excellently: "Maupassant was also a literalist, and this native trait served to render his realism colder and more unsympathetic. By this I mean that to him two and three

always summed up five — his temperament would not allow for the unseen, imponderable force of spiritual things; and even when he mentions the spiritual, it is with a sort of tolerant unbelief which scorns to deny the superstitious solace of women, weaklings and zealots." [1] Hence Maupassant, consummate master of form and Short-story technique though he is, has failed to reach and control the hearts of men.[2]

Although having certain common qualities, the personalities of story-tellers vary widely. This difference naturally shows itself in the kind of story that each one can write best. One may have special ability in treating the humorous. For another, the pathetic may be the imaginative stimulus. Some persons may write of the occult with greater natural zest than they could of the simple and plain. As the personality of the writer varies, so varies the type of story that he can most effectively produce. This divergence affects not only one's choice of

[1] *Short-story Masterpieces: French.* Edited by J. B. Esenwein, pp. 54–5.

[2] That he was conscious at times of this withering weakness in his own personality appears pitifully in a letter of his to Marie Bashkirtseff: "Everything in life is almost alike to me, men, women, events. This is my true confession of faith, and I may add what you may not believe, which is that I do not care any more for myself than I do for the rest. All is divided into ennui, comedy, and misery. I am indifferent to everything. I pass two-thirds of my time in being terribly bored. I pass the third portion in writing sentences which I sell as dear as I can, regretting that I have to ply this abominable trade." Quoted by Pol. Neveux in his study of Guy de Maupassant.

subjects, but one's attitude toward them. What seems humor as told by one often falls flat when related by another. Whether one's attitude is playful or serious is determined by the nature of the writer. Mr. Aldrich might have treated *Marjorie Daw* seriously, but for him the whimsical was the natural manner. How different are Hawthorne, and Kipling, and Henry James, and Poe, in their stories! Hawthorne was always trying to work out the spiritual relations of things. He was a moral analyst. Kipling seems to love life in all its aspects. His is a buoyant nature, always finding novelty, always searching for that which is interesting. He is not subtle. He accepts the world as he finds it; and he finds it a place full of love and hatred, full of suffering and woe, yet withal full of exuberant life. Henry James is the intellectual analyst, eager to work out all problems rationally. He finds the world an interesting phenomenon. He loves it as a mechanic loves his engine. He would adjust the machinery, tighten a bolt, and oil a bearing. Poe, on the other hand, entered into life with a passion, — but a morbid passion. All beauty was for him poisoned with decay.[1] Imagine Hawthorne trying to write a story with the single impression of *They*.

[1] "Passionately fond of beauty, he conceived the melancholy idea that beauty and grace are interesting only in their overthrow. 'I have imbibed,' he says, 'the shadows of fallen columns at Balbec, and Tadmor, and Persepolis, until my very soul has become a ruin.' And his stories have the romantic interest of glimpses of splendid ruins." Albright, *The Short-story*, p. 185.

He would have made it uncanny. It would have made its reader feel as if he were trespassing on another realm. Imagine Kipling writing *The Madonna of the Future.* Instead of emphasizing Mr. Theobald's artistic idealism, Kipling would have insisted on the heart-break of the man's failure. How different, too, were the touches of Poe and Hawthorne. It is the personality of the individual men which makes the difference in their stories.

He who writes stories knows his own personality. He has found by experience the kind of stories which he can write best. He feels it his duty to express his own personality and not to write stories or to use a style absolutely foreign to his nature. He need have no fear of expressing himself, for the world may be waiting, unconsciously, for just what he has to say in the way that he chooses to say it. By trying to imitate another's stories or another's style, he loses his own originality, which is nothing more or less than the genuine reflection of his personality.[1] He never can do so well as can the one he is trying to imitate. Moreover, he can never assimilate another's personality. If he try,

[1] "And that virtue of originality that men so strain after, is not *newness*, as they vainly think (there is nothing new), it is only *genuineness;* it all depends on this single glorious faculty of getting to the spring of things and working out from that; it is the coolness, and clearness, and deliciousness of the water fresh from the fountain head, opposed to the thick, hot, unrefreshing drainage from other men's meadows." Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, vol. ii, sec. ii, chap. III, p. 253, Library Edition.

he will be neither himself nor the other person; he will be in a limbo of his own from which only a long penitence and the reclaiming of his own proper self can ever release him. He may, as did Stevenson for awhile, play the sedulous ape to many masters, but in the end his Short-stories will be valuable only in proportion as they express his own personality.

When one takes personality as well as form into account, the great Short-story rises to something of the dignity of the poem. In studying it appreciatively, still more in writing it, one is forced not only to the realization of a careful literary form, but also to the development — to a greater or less extent — of those same qualities of intellectual grasp, of imaginative power, and of sympathetic insight which belong to the great story-teller. One may say also of the Short-story: "Of course the suggestiveness of any work — poem, picture, novel, essay — depends largely upon what we bring to it; whether we bring a kindred spirit or an alien one, a full mind or an empty one, an alert sense or a dull one. If you have been there, so to speak, if you have passed through the experience described, if you have known the people portrayed, if you have thought, or tried to think, the thoughts the author exploits, the work will have a deeper meaning to you than to one who is a stranger to these things. . . . It is the deep hollows and passes of the mountains that give back your voice in prolonged reverberations. The tides are in the sea, not in the

lakes and ponds. Words of deep import do not mean much to a child. The world of books is under the same law as these things. What any given work yields us depends largely upon what we bring to it." [1] Moreover, in writing, a man is led to explore his own personality. He is seeing the world through his own eyes. Things take on fresh luster because they are made new to him. He is no longer the slave of other men's vision. He is himself. As Mr. Eastman says, in *Enjoyment of Poetry:* "This is the priesthood of art — not to bestow upon the universe a new aspect, but upon the beholder a new enthusiasm."

We read a great Short-story as we do a great poem, — not to feel a moment's yearning, the call of something which can never distinctly reach us; we read it because it fills us with a new enthusiasm for living. It makes us wish to endure, and love, and hate; to hope, aspire, and work; to fill our youth with joyous labor, and to grow old still in the joy of living. We wish to go forth with the tingling of battle in our nerves. We should soon revert to the humdrum, to think that every day is like every other day, to think that every star is like every other star, to let our thoughts run ever around in the same track, to carry out the details of life as if we were machines, were there not always before us stimulation to new achievement, were our eyes not opened by our catching now and then a glimpse of another's vision. All true art has this beneficent

[1] Burroughs, *Literary Values*, pp. 239–40, Riverby Edition.

effect; one cannot indeed claim it for the Short-story alone. Yet the Short-story may have its share in keeping the echo of true aspirations ringing through men's souls. The great Short-story does not die when it is read. It has awakened thoughts which rouse men from their drowsiness, nor do they ever go back into quite their old lethargy. They feel new impulse to experience, to fresh resolve. The lesser Short-story may have swept our emotion an hour, and be gone as the wind from the tree-tops; but the great Short-story takes its place in art along with great poetry, great music, great painting.

The present commercialization of the Short-story is working against this development and revelation of personality. "Give the public what it demands" is the saying, — irrespective of whether that is what a writer wishes to produce or can produce best, if he but take the time. To be true to oneself is a difficult task, a high calling: it takes time, and courage, and devotion to an ideal. Many people can grind out a best seller for some cheap periodical; few are willing to pay the price that produces a *Mrs. Knollys*, or a *They*. It is to be regretted, too, that many books treating of the Short-story are encouraging this commercial spirit. Let us rather enter our protest in the name of true art. Let us urge anew upon every one who would enter the Short-story field to come to it as to high art, with a message: to be true to the highest, to live by the gospel of the best. To produce a Short-

story in this way may take a lifetime. Yet the true writer knows how

> . . . to bide his time
> And can his fame abide,
> Still patient in his simple faith sublime,
> Till the wise years decide.
> Great captains with their guns and drums
> Disturb our judgment for the hour,
> But at last silence comes,[1]

and the verdict of ages.

[1] James Russell Lowell, *Harvard Commemoration Ode.*

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